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WHY THAILAND'S MILITARY STEPPED IN

by

Andrew C. O'Connor

March 2011

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WHY THAILAND'S MILITARY STEPPED IN

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand
NPKC	National Peacekeeping Council
PAD	People's Alliance for Democracy
TRT	Thai Rak Thai

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I.   INTRODUCTION

A.   MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

At first glance, Thailand's coups of 1991 and 2006 appear to have been business as usual. After all, Thailand has experienced 18 successful military coups since the end of the last absolute monarchy in 1932, and has been subject to several other unsuccessful attempts. What makes these two most recent coups different is that both were regime changes away from democratically elected governments, whereas the preceding coups primarily changed the military faction and leader in government. The first took place after a decade of gradual changes of democratization, the second after several changes of government through competitive elections and the implementation of a strongly democratic constitution promulgated in 1997.

Why did the Thai military intervene in 1991 and 2006 to take over the political process by replacing civilian executive leaders with its generals after significant strides toward consolidating democracy, the seemingly widespread adoption of democratic values in Thai society, development of a significant middle class, and expansion of private business interests and wealth? What implication might this have for theories about civil-military relations in general and about coups d'état more specifically? This thesis seeks to explain the drastic and successful intervention of the Thai military into politics at these two junctures and considers what this means for Thailand's political path in the near- to mid-term. In doing so, it tests two theories about why military coups occur and why some succeed, helping build knowledge about civil-military relations in democratizing states.

The dependent variable of this study is the presence and outcome of a military coup that resulted in military rule of one year or longer. Independent variables will be drawn from recent studies that suggest military coups are the result of a complex mix of structural, cultural, and rational choice conditions. Factors drawn from structural and cultural literatures are used to support the primary role of identity theory for the Thai military. Using the cases of Thai military coups of 1991 and 2006 as examples, this

thesis identifies which combination of factors is necessary and sufficient in determining why, when, and how the military intervenes into politics. By incorporating the periods of apparent democratic consolidation prior to each coup, this thesis also identifies periods when coups do not occur because the sufficient conditions are yet not present.

B.   IMPORTANCE

Thailand is the world's twenty-fifth largest economy by GDP and the twentieth-largest population.[1] As a key regional partner of the United States in Southeast Asia for the past 60 years, Thailand is also a significant contributor to regional institutions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and has been held up as a solid example of democratization in the region. Over the past 30 years, Thailand's society and economy have experienced rapid change, growth, and modernization as a result of embracing globalization and export-driven economic growth. Thailand was heavily involved in the Vietnam War as a U.S. base and aligned itself U.S. policies. The changes in Thailand have included increased urbanization, higher levels of education, a rising middle class and private business wealth, exposure to Western values, and more horizontally structured civil-society organizations. The changes are closely associated with the development of democratic institutions.[2] These appeared to set Thailand on the path to becoming a modern nation-state with clear civilian control over the military.

The deposing of democratically elected Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra by the Thai military in 2006, however, demonstrated that coups are not yet a thing of Thailand's past. Global studies of coups and subsequent military rule, even for brief periods of time, indicate that Thailand is likely to face less freedom, more injustice, and less prosperity, none of which serve in the national security interests of the United States.[3] These

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[1] CIA World Factbook, "East and Southeast Asia: Thailand," September 2010, Central Intelligence Agency, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/th.html (accessed September 19, 2010).

[2] Larry Jay Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset (eds.), *Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy* (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner Publishers, 1990), 18–31.

[3] Peter Karsten (Ed.), "The Coup d'Etat in Competitive Democracies: Its Appropriateness, Its Causes and Its Avoidance," in *Civil Military Relations*, 223–250 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998).

unexpected developments and the ongoing civil unrest since the 2006 coup raise doubts about whether Thailand can become a competitive democracy when military takeovers remain a distinct possibility.

Understanding the last two coups in Thailand has broader implications for the role of the military in governance and society in democratizing states, civil-military relations, and the future of political stability in Thailand. In comparing the coups of 1991 and 2006, this thesis contributes to our knowledge about the reasoning and conditions that precipitate coups and the subsequent impact on the future of governance. While the literature on why coups occur is relatively abundant, there is still a gap in understanding why they occur in middle-income states like Thailand that have experienced some democratic consolidation. Similarly, there is still much to learn about why coups occur in states that have experienced a fair degree of modernization, which is characterized by a broadly accepted, state-driven nationalism, highly differentiated bureaucracy, and industrialization.

This thesis explores what factors within Thai society permitted intervention by the military so directly in politics, so recently in the kingdom's history. What is the identity of the military that leads it to view itself as the ultimate guarantor of Thai society? How does the Thai military define a professional force? Has it adopted the modern notion of military separation from policymaking and an outward focus to national security? Or does it, as militaries in developing states tend to do, imagine itself as a critical modernizing force and a primary protector of nascent democratic institutions?

In the traditional view, the officers of modern militaries seek to be professionals in the management of violence.[4] According to Samuel Huntington, professionalism lends itself to objective civilian control, and the military's intervention in the political process is the antithesis of a professional force.[5] Other theories about civil-military relations, especially in developing nations, recognize some position for the military in the political

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4 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1957), 534.

5 Ibid.

process.[6] What is this role and how much of the political process should include the military? How do the two most recent cases of coups in Thailand fit the theories of civil-military relations and military coups d'état?

C.   PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

The most significant challenge with studying military coups in Thailand is identifying the military mindsets that precipitated each coup. This step will require an understanding of the Thai military identity and the role of civil-military relations in Thailand. Linked to this is the difficulty of sorting public narratives from personal beliefs and calculations. The relative freedom of the press in Thailand, and the very public nature of recent political contestation through the media, to some degree help overcome these challenges to understanding the 2006 coup. Secondary sources and rich analysis since the 1991 coup aid in understanding the military identity and roles present before and during this earlier event. Interviews with some of the key players in each coup and experts on Thai military, culture, and politics will help separate public rhetoric from core beliefs.

This thesis hypothesizes that the broadly conceived and accepted role of the military within Thailand's society, political institutions, and economy shapes its perception about the necessity of intervention in politics. This thesis begins by identifying the role of the military in Thai politics, society, economy, and security. This foundation develops an understanding of the Thai military identity. By exploring the military's history, political activity, and composure, this thesis attempts to present an understanding of how the military perceived the situation at the time of the 1991 and 2006 coups. This identity is shaped by various influences of Thai society—the monarchy, an elite class of military leaders, and rising influence from the middle class and private business interests—and by the operations of the military, which are mostly domestic. Also, this thesis hypothesizes that the identity of the Thai military and its role of Thai society will sustain the military's place in Thai politics in the near term.

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[6] Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960).

With some understanding about the military's identity, thus generated, this thesis applies two theories about coups d'état to support the developed concept of identity. Karsten's analysis suggests five causes for coups, including economic distress, political corruption, political stalemate, affronts to military values, and direct threats to military interests. Koonings and Krujit offer reasons for intervention based on national history, military competence, and civilian incompetence. By applying these factors in the cases of Thailand's 1991 and 2006 coups, this thesis presents a better understanding of the structural conditions and mindsets that can lead to a coup in Thailand. The causes for these coups have implications for civil-military relations in Thailand and indicate when the military will intervene in Thai politics. Understanding the conditions and mindsets for when the military intervenes into politics will support the reasoning for why the military will continue to play a significant role in those politics. These theories are supported by the two cases of this study. In Thailand in 1991 and 2006, the necessary and sufficient conditions for the coups resulted from a specific combination of Karsten's causes for coups and the reasons to act as a political army from Koonings and Krujit.

Finally, this thesis explores the implications of these understandings on the future of Thai governance. This thesis hypothesizes that the people and the military of Thailand have yet to reach agreement about the legitimacy of liberal democracy as the right and proper regime for their society; despite trappings of modernity, several factors about traditional Thai society, especially the perceived role of the law, legal institutions, and the monarchy, will continue to complicate attempts to reach a new state-society agreement that could relegate coups to Thai history.

D.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Thailand has a unique history within the developing world. David Wyatt's *Thailand: A Short History* provides a foundational timeline of this history up to the early 1980s.[7] The book captures the formation of the various Tai cultures in Southeast Asia, the first kingdom that developed in the fourteenth century, and the widest area of Siamese sovereignty as consolidated by King Rama III in 1850. The growth of Thai nationalism

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7 David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

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and exposure to new ideas after WWI led by King Rama VI brought an end to the absolute monarchy with the first military coup in 1932. This event also began the military's role of bringing modernization to the Thai people. This history also includes the renaming of the state to Thailand from the more inclusive Siam, the restoration of a central role for the monarchy under the current king, and the inauguration of current senior statesman General Prem Tinsulanond as civilian Prime Minister from 1980–1988 and a major influence since through his role on the Privy Council.

The nationalism that started under Rama VI contained the three central tenets of Thai national identity that persist today: nation, religion, and monarchy. The facets of Thai identity are explored in Craig Reynolds's *National Identity and its Defenders: Thailand Today*.[8] This collection of essays explores the development and current state of what it is to be Thai. This contrasts with the other ethnicities and cultures present in Thailand. Duncan McCargo and Supara Janchitfah, for instance, explore the distinct culture of Malay-Muslims in southern Thailand and how difficult it has been for the state to assimilate them into Thai society.[9] The Malay-Muslims in Thailand's south, and other ethnic minorities elsewhere, have suffered from the unicultural nationalist policies of a Bangkok-centralized identity of the central Thai people, who were more concerned about the Chinese business elite in Bangkok than the cultures and governance of the periphery.

Thai nationalism has impacted the role of the military in Thailand. Particularly, the elite in Thailand shape the concept of national security, so the role of the military evolves as the membership of the elite changes.[10] The monarchy has had a strong impact on the military and its politics. While the king maintains a paternal role over Thai society, Paul Handley explores the politically active role the king has pursued, including

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8 Craig J. Reynolds (ed.), *National Identity and its Defenders: Thailand Today* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002).

9 Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 235; Supara Janchitfah, *Violence in the Mist: Reporting on the Presence of Pain in Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Asia Foundation, 2004).

10 Panitan Wattanayagorn, "Thailand: The Elite's Shifting Conceptions of Security," in *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

in the coups of 1991 and 2006.[11] The roles of the monarchy and military in Thai politics contrasts with the appearances that Thailand had been moving toward liberal democracy with the appropriate civilian control over the military. By most appearances, the military returned to the barracks after the 1991 coup while the country gradually transitioned to civilian political leadership. After the 1997 Constitution, civilian authority over the Thai military appeared to be even stronger and coups a distant memory.[12]

In addition to reviewing how Thai history and national identity have shaped the role of the military, theories about civil-military relations and coups will be applied to the case of Thailand. Samuel Huntington describes an ideal type of a professional military force.[13] This professionalism is best served under the balance of military and civilian political power that creates the sense of objective control: "The antithesis of objective civilian control is military participation in politics: civilian control decreases as the military become progressively involved in institutional, class and constitutional politics."[14] Huntington also defines an understanding of the "military mind" as the common characteristics of the attitudes and ethics for professional military officers. These professional soldiers come to act as "civil servants in uniform." This ideal type of professional military, however, is mostly applied to a relatively few developed nations, with the exception of India, Mexico and a handful of others. The ideas presented by Huntington also benefit from the updated work by Suzanne Neilsen and Don Snider, which provides insights from events since Huntington's seminal publication.[15] These works suggest a strong role for military identity, as well as for structural conditions such as democratization and economic development.

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11 Paul M. Handley, *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://site.ebrary.com.libproxy.nps.edu/lib/nps/Doc?id=10169993, (accessed September 19, 2010).

12 James Ockey, "Thailand: The Struggle to Redefine Civil-Military Relations," in *Coercion and Governance: The Declining Political Role of the Military in Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Duncan McCargo and Ukrist Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2005).

13 Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 80.

14 Ibid., 83.

15 Suzanne C. Nielsen and Don M. Snider, *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

Morris Janowitz develops the idea of a constabulary force that is ready to support the interests of the nation with the full range of military operations along with externally directed diplomacy. Although Janowitz applies this concept to international relations,[16] his work also provides contributions to the role of the military in developing nations and acknowledges that some military juntas take political control of the country in order to modernize the nation. With the goal of modernization comes the warning that "the military must be able to do more than merely conserve its power."[17] Janowitz also concludes that "that the form of political participation which military regimes permit and encourage directly influences the extent and viability of the trend toward the civilianization of military regimes."[18] Like Huntington, his explanations for the level of professionalization of the military in developing states are generally ideological and structural.

Through quantitative analysis of 33 cases, Peter Karsten examines why military coups occur. He finds that in states where some democratic consolidation has occurred, coups tend to include some necessary, but not sufficient, causes.[19] According to Karsten, a combination of economic distress, political corruption, political stalemate, affronts to military corporate values, and threats to military corporate interests are the foundations that lead to coups.[20] He concludes with several recommendations for how states can avoid future coups. While this work makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the factors that contribute to military coups, its weakness lies in not assigning priority to these factors.

16 Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, 12.

17 Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations*, Expanded edition of *The Military in the Political Development of New Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 180.

18 Henry Bienen, *The Military Intervenes: Case Studies in Political Development* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968), 5.

19 Peter Karsten, *Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Garland Pub., 1998), 223.

20 Ibid., 225.

Kees Koonings and Dirk Krujit provide some background for the development of a political army and insight into the military's role in intervening in politics.[21] Political militaries derive their purpose for steering the national destiny from three basic principles: birthright, competence, and civilian inadequacy. By the "birthright" principle, the foundational myth that the military institution was present at the birth of the nation leads to strong forms of identification within the military to the nation, its principles and it values. The "competence principle" incorporates the resources and structure of the military to claim that it is best positioned to care for national interests, given its capability, organizational characteristics, and identity with the nation. The "principle of civilian inadequacy" stresses the divided nature and inefficiencies of civilian politicians and claims "states can only rely on force and loyalty; so it has the armed forces as its sole and ultimate guarantor."[22] These principles as "generic notions are transformed into specific military doctrines that not only offer motivation and legitimacy to military intervention in politics, but also provide specific strategic guidance with respect to the form, content and timing of such interventions."[23] These formational principles for a political army will be applied to Thailand to help explain its actions as a political force. The weakness of this study is that only a few cases are available that demonstrate a transition within the military to accepting civilian rule, even as the pressure to democratize increases.

E.   METHODS AND SOURCES

Approaching a better understanding of recent Thai history, military identity and its role in civil-military relations, and structural conditions requires a diverse set of materials. This thesis will conduct a comparative study of Thailand's coups of 1991 and 2006 carried out by reviewing and analyzing the literature and reporting associated with Thailand before, during, and immediately after these events. Sufficient English-language literature is available on each of these coups.   Most address the coups separately,

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21 Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2002).

22 Ibid., 19.

23 Ibid., 21.

evaluating the causes and outcomes of each independently. This thesis approaches this literature in combination with an understanding of the Thai military identity, derived from historic analysis and evaluation of current trends. Interviews conducted in Thailand with former generals, current government officials, democratization experts, leading scholars, and U.S. Embassy personnel added information about the events. The research travel was limited to Bangkok, thus lacking the complete national perspective; however, the co-location of the relevant personnel to interview indicated the centrality of Bangkok to the political system and the events of this study. Further, walking around Bangkok and meeting with middle-class and politically connected people reinforced the political views in the literature and provided context for opinions and specific events.

With the two coups having occurred only 15 years apart, the events of the first may have had an impact on the events in the second. However, the 1997 "People's Constitution" provides a significant marker for dividing the periods. The periods of review include a period of apparent democratic consolidation and the coup that followed. The era of Prime Minister Prem, which saw a military-led transition to a more democratic regime, provides a framework for the coup of 1991 and shapes the outcomes and responses by the people and the government.

The 1997 Constitution came at a time of financial crisis and was a major milestone in the Kingdom's transition toward greater democratization. Instead of producing a coup near that tumultuous time, as Karsten and others would predict, Thailand experienced nearly a decade of increased political participation. Instead, it appears that the changes in the political climate in Thailand after the 1997 Constitution gradually created the conditions that formed the basis for the coup of 2006. The decade or so of developments prior to each coup shaped the conditions for the events that occurred in the six months just prior to each coup.

The coups of both 1991 and 2006 are compared in how they fit to the conditions presented by Koonings and Krujit, and Karsten. Each section of this thesis explores how Thailand's military acted as Koonings and Krujit describe as a political army: the birthright principle, civilian incompetence, and military competence. The identity of Thailand's military exhibits the birthright principle before each coup, and the political

conditions at the time provide the structural reasons for the military to make its decisions. The sections also explain how Karsten's factors combine to cause each coup. The values of the military are associated with its identity, which in each case aligns with the traditional elites that dominated the political process. The interests of the military leaders are manifestations of those values and, in particular for each coup, are associated with military promotions. Political stalemate results from the elected government's inability to retain political power and is operationlized in cabinet turnovers and constitutional deadlock. In comparing Thailand's two most recent coups conditions that are common and different between the coups are identified. Without attempting to construct a strict chart, some understanding about the sufficient and necessary conditions that cause Thai military coups emerges.

F.   THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis will proceed as follows. Chapter II explores the history of Thailand as a kingdom from its historic roots in the thirteenth century CE through the 1980s. This history includes the origins of the military as a support for the monarchy and later an extensive involvement of the military in the modern political structure. The history establishes some initial thematic elements for the military values and its identity. The role and identity of the military contributes to the cultural context of the two coups of this study.

Chapter III explores the conditions surrounding the 1991 coup. After a period of a semi-democratic political structure was introduced in the 1980s, an elected official entered the office of Prime Minister in 1988 with the political support of business interests and appeared to mark the initiation of democracy in the political system. After three years, the traditionally minded military leaders asserted control over the political process and ousted the elected leaders. Several conditions combined to make the coup successful. The military remained a political force, unchecked from asserting its authority except by the monarchy. Furthermore, the elected government demonstrated

incompetence and political stalemate opened the opportunity for the military to step in. The military leaders, identifying with their historical role within the political system, stepped in.

Chapter IV explores the conditions surrounding the 2006 coup. Thaksin Shinawatra entered the office of Prime Minister under a democratic electoral system that enabled a strong executive role. During Thaksin's administration, the system collapsed into a constitutional deadlock as a result of the corrupted electoral process and independent bodies intended to oversee the political system, and abuse of the authority of the executive office for personal gain and security concerns. The military leaders were re-politicized by Thaksin's involvement in the promotions process, and one faction preferred the system as run by the network monarchy led by Prem. With the political stalemate, the re-politicized military felt compelled to step in again.

Chapter V summarizes the findings and explains whether the results support the hypotheses, namely that military identity is one of the most important factors, but not the only one, driving coups in Thailand. The chapter includes a critical assessment of the applicability of the two theories tested on Thailand and lists the necessary factors that in combination are sufficient for a coup to occur. The conclusion, in light of the research, has implications for the future possibilities of democracy and coups in Thailand. Additionally, the chapter includes implications and some recommendations for the United States' policies toward Thailand considering the coups and possible domestic political instability, as well as regional balance of power.

II. THE HISTORY AND CORPORATE VALUES OF THAILAND'S MILITARY

A. INTRODUCTION

The coups in Thailand that occurred in 1991 and 2006 were not random events or irrational actions by military leaders. Both of these coups occurred in a social and political context that permitted the action to occur in a rational manner and with an expectation of success. The political and social context of governance in Thailand that permitted such coups has shaped and been shaped by the corporate values of Thailand's military. The corporate values of Thailand's military are here assessed by a review of the military's continued involvement in governance from its beginning in 1932 to the period preceding the 1991 coup.

Through a historical review of the military's origins and involvement in national governance since 1932, this thesis identifies three themes of interrelated values for Thailand's military. First, Thailand's military has been a political organization. Second, the military supports the traditional institution of the monarchy and in particular its long reigning, charismatic King Bhumibol Adulyadej as a source of political legitimacy for Thailand. Finally, the military's concept of national security extends beyond the defense of national borders, and the leadership's notion of professionalism supports this concept. All of these themes are interrelated in their causes and implications. The actions taken by Thailand's military are best understood in the context of these themes and their interrelationship.

Assessing the values of Thailand's military requires a review of its origins and an understanding of its sense of professionalism. According to Koonings and Krujit, political militaries derive their purpose for steering the national destiny from three basic principles: birthright, competence, and civilian inadequacy. "The 'birthright principle'…implies that the military are perceived to have been at the birth of the

nation."[24] This principle generally refers to militaries that developed to fight for independence from a colonizing power, but the state of Thailand in Asia is unique in the context of colonialism, having never been formally colonized by an external power. The origins of Thailand's military, however, are just as influential on its corporate values in making it a political army. In addition to its origins, the Thai sense of professionalism among the military leaders also calls them to political action. In "Affronts To The Military's Values," Karsten explains that generals educated alongside civilian elites conclude that the military's responsibilities include national development; so "professional" officers are called to political action.[25] Thomas applies a similar understanding to Thailand within a framework that links professionalism with corporatism seeking to maximize autonomy and to formulate as well as implement national security policy.[26] The following historical review of Thailand explores how a political army emerged and how professionalism as defined by this military permits and requires continued involvement in politics.

The actions of Thailand's military may benefit the organization in terms of immediate interests, but the interests themselves are influenced by the deeper values of the organization. Values emerge from a culture, a social and, in this case, a political context that assigns meanings to ideas and actions. Values, based on cultural context, represent what is important beyond the immediate benefit and tend to have perceived long-term implications. This thesis determines that the values for Thailand's military include particular meanings for the country's political structure and the military's role within that structure. Interests refer to the more immediate consequences of a situation and the near-term results of actions. Situations for interests include budgets, promotions, operations, and the like. Interests have costs and benefits of their own on which the

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24 Koonings and Kruijt, *Political Armies*, 19.

25 Karsten, "The Coup d'Etat in Competitive Democracies," 233.

26 M. Ladd Thomas, "Limited Disengagement of the Military from Thai Politics," in *Military Disengagement from Politics*, ed. Constantine P. Danopoulos, 127 (London: Routledge, 1988).

actors make contingent decisions, but they exist in a structure of values that influence those tradeoffs. By assessing the values of Thailand's military, its interests are better understood within their context.

Fitting particular events into categories of interest or value becomes cumbersome and misleading. Rather than attempting to define specific criteria for interests and values, which are so closely related, "structured contingency" provides a framework for the two to influence each other. (The goal of this thesis is not to determine whether the chicken or egg came first, but to assess how the egg-laying process affects later iterations.) As Bratton and van de Walle explain, "Attention to a *structured contingency* approach allows, on the one hand, that structural precedents impart shape to current events, and on the other, private decisions change even durable public institutions."[27]

Thailand's military was created by and continues to exist within a particular social and political context, which shapes its values and interests. Given the prominent role the military has taken within Thailand's governance, however, the organization in turn influences the institutions of governance. This relationship of structure to contingency exists in a wider context of the nature of the relationship of state to the society and society's acceptance of regime and ruler. As Young phrases it:

> By regime I understand a given political formula for the exercise of state rule…A regime develops a logic of its own, whose ultimate aim is the reproduction over time of its particular configuration of institutional arrangements and dominant ideas…The ruler has yet a different logic: to remain in power.[28]

This thesis identifies the key political events that determine the political context of later actions. In this series of events, values become evident and provide context and structure to actors whose interests affect their contingent actions.

Reviewing the history of Thailand's military, particularly its role in governance, reveals several corporate values and its role as a political military. How Thailand's

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27 Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 45.

28 Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 40.

military came into being and the role it has in Thailand shapes its actions and its outlook. As a political organization, Thailand's military supports the political structure centered on a traditional, albeit constitutional, monarchy. Supporting this structure requires action beyond defending national borders to include taking an active role in national development and thus politics. The military's sense of professionalism includes responsibility for supporting the social and political structure, and this sense of duty thus shapes the military's actions.

B.   ABSOLUTE MONARCHY AND THE ROLE OF ELITES

The role of Thailand's elites dominates Thailand's history. The individual rulers of Thailand's ancient and modern history had so much power that they materially affected the lives of the people.[29] In the fifteenth century kingdom of Ayudhya, a Tai king built the *sakdi na* system on long-established common law principles within the kingdom and enacted a series of laws that for every person delineated a very specified social hierarchy, codifying elite status.[30] After its Burman neighbors destroyed the Kingdom of Ayudhya in 1767, a new kingdom of Siam arose in its place. Since 1782, under Rama I, Siam has centered rule in Bangkok.[31] Consolidation of the widest area of influence over Tai and other peoples occurred under King Rama III by 1850, when threats would come no longer from Tai people and their neighbors but from French, British, and Dutch colonizers in Burma, the Malay peninsula, and Indochina.[32] In Siam, like elsewhere in eighteenth century Southeast Asia, political leadership focused more on control over the population than the territory: "Ordinary Siamese were divided into two types of clients (*phrai*), royal and nonroyal. As such they were registered to serve their

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29 Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, xiv.

30 Ibid., 73.

31 Ibid., 145.

32 Ibid., 180.

king or their princely and noble patrons."[33]   Appointment of government ministers oversaw the movement of people and protected the king's interests.[34]

Siam's king eventually adopted modern, bureaucratic forms to enact its power. Because the new state institutions were developed by the elites, they were founded on traditional institutions that legitimated the king's power. King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) in 1873 began reforms with a vision to modernize Siam to a bureaucratic state with a Buddhist morality that could still meet the standards of the West: "All [reforms] directly or indirectly strengthened the king's political position… Only much later did the king begin to realize the contradiction inherent in this vision."[35]   In these reforms Chulalongkorn instituted the forms of the modern state, but appointing royal family members in a traditional patron-client relationship undermined the creation of a rational-legal state. Modernizing the bureaucracy through centralized, patrimonial politics threatened the interests of traditional elites outside of the monarchy; but wholly rational-legal reforms were believed to be a threat to the political structure centered on the monarch and supported by the Buddhist Sangha and military. The identification with the central authority is still relevant today for social institutions like the state, the monarchy, and the Sangha, because the national identity and the sources of legitimacy in Thailand derive their meanings from their proximity to the central authority.[36]   The central authority of the elites in Thailand are, in return, legitimated and strengthened by the national institutions.

The religious institution of Theravada Buddhism remains central to Thai national identity and influences the political structure even today. The history of the Thais roots itself in the history of Buddhism, gradually shifted to the Tai dynasties, and ultimately to

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33 Norman G. Owen, ed., *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press), 68.

34 Ibid, 68.

35 Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 192.

36 Hans-Dieter Bechstedt, "Identity and Authority in Thailand," in *National Identity and its Defenders: Thailand Today* (rev. ed.), ed. Craig J. Reynolds (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 253.

modern Thai nationalism.[37] The religious construct shapes how the people perceive political leaders. From the Buddhist tradition, the Thai concept of *thammasat*—the social contract of kingship—endows the political leader with the dharma that will ensure his one day becoming a Buddha, so the political leader is the de facto moral leader with some divine legitimacy.[38] Mongkut, the monk turned monarch, shifted the cosmology of Theravada Buddhism toward humankind's having an active role in shaping the world order: "He thus opened the possibility that some aspects of the world might not simply be accepted as reflections of an unchanging cosmology but might be changed by humans through application of knowledge of nature."[39] This shift in the religion solidified the patrimonial role of the monarch by connecting him to the future of the society. Such a foundation for the political role of the monarchy embeds the responsibility of leadership over the society into the monarchy, and the endowment of this religious role to the monarchy elevates his position within the society. With legitimacy of the monarchy connected to religious identity, longevity, and perceived uniqueness of the Thai state, the monarchy of Thailand has deep roots within the society and has intermingled responsibilities in the religious, social, and political aspects of the national identity. Legitimacy for Thailand's monarchy today still extends from the "merit and virtue" of those who belong to the royal lineage.[40]

The Thai military came into being to support this centralized structure. From the roots of the eighteenth century, "the Siamese system closely associated, if it did not merge, military and civil interests; the Thai work for government minister (*senabodi*) originally meant army general."[41] Under the absolute monarchy that interacted with the colonial powers in the nineteenth century, "Despite the Western structure, discipline and

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37 Charnvit Kasetsiri, "Thai Historiography from Ancient Times to the Modern Period," in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, eds. Anthony Reid and David G. Marr (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979).

38 Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 483.

39 Charles F. Keyes, "Buddhist Politics and their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand," *International Political Science Review 10*, no. 2 (1989), http://www.jstor.org/stable/1600711 (accessed September 19, 2010).

40 Keyes, "Buddhist Politics and their Revolutionary Origins in Thailand," 127.

41 Owen, *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: A New History*, 68.

ethics being taught at the academies, the emerging modern Thai army resembled Western militaries of an earlier era in certain respects: promotion and even admission to the officer corps depended on [social or political] status."[42] Connections to the royal family, government officials, and military officers were necessary for entry into the military academies; and the highest positions in the military were reserved for the royal family.[43] The patrimonial governance also applied to the military, too. The military that emerged by the twentieth century was a political force shaped by the colonial environment surrounding it. The Thai military did not fight a war to secure its borders or repel European invaders; the Thai military was united and sufficiently for the Europeans to permit this kingdom to remain independent. As Benedict Anderson noted, "Between 1840 and 1940 the state ceases not only to engage in warfare but to seriously contemplate doing so."[44] Instead, the military in Thailand protected the interests of the central state and monarchy against the local power interests. "Like the colonial armies of its neighbors, the Thai military was explicitly political, was modernized to protect the regime from domestic enemies and enforce its policies, and was not intended for external defense."[45] With the reforms by King Chulalongkorn and his successors, some Western education and ideas of new forms of governance entered the military ranks, but its roots ultimately remained in the centralized state with a religiously legitimated monarch as the sovereign.   Duncan McCargo concludes, "The Royal Thai Army, however, is a uniformed bureaucracy that does not fight wars…It never waged an independence struggle and has never repelled invaders in modern times."[46] This has kept Thailand's military focused on internal duties.

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42 Ockey, "Thailand," 190.

43 Ibid., 191.

44 Benedict R. O'G Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies," in *The Study of Thailand: Analyses of Knowledge, Approaches and Prospects in Anthropology, Art History, Economics, History, and Political Science*, ed. Eliezer B. Ayal, 202 (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Program, 1978).

45 Ibid., 191.

46 McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land*, 98.

C. 1932 COUP AND THE MILITARY IN GOVERNANCE

Thailand's military coup of 1932 ended the absolute monarchy by installing a constitutional monarchy, but this was not a revolution. Installing military leaders at the top of political institutions neither altered the patrimonial structure of Thai governance nor created a rational-legal model of government. Huntington's evaluation of Thailand's coups through the 1950s was that this was an example of praetorian regimes where the political competition among the military leaders established in politics the interests of the middle class.[47] The 1932 Coup in Thailand, however, was not akin to the Meiji restoration of Japan—in which military force brought in the interests of the business class—for the social and political consequences were very different for the military and the society.[48] Rather than a revolution, the coup enhanced the military's role within the existing patrimonial structure.

Although the military may have been reform minded, its political nature and subsequent elite role in politics prevented any genuine reform. Also, the military at the time represented a society seeking reforms, but not necessarily seeking democracy. The coup leaders may have perceived that rhetoric of democracy was necessary for a modern state, but they believed society would still require close paternalistic guidance to be ready for this political structure. The opportunity was available to instill the principles of democracy, but the military ultimately stepped in to defend its elite role. Thus, these forms of democratic governance attempted by the various military leaders at this juncture lacked real substance.[49] The intervention by the military had other consequences on the institutions of governance. The success of the 1932 coup cemented the military's relationship with the bureaucracy, brought the military into politics during a perceived crisis, and permitted the military to believe itself a force for democracy.[50] The 1932 coup

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47 Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, 201.

48 Anderson, "Studies of the Thai State: The State of Thai Studies," 201.

49 Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country and Constitutions: Thailand's Political Development 1932–2000* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 3.

50 Ockey, "Thailand," 191.

changed the regime of leadership for several decades, but it neither effectively changed the structure of state-society relations nor elite governance.

That the military sought to maintain the elite, patrimonial structure is evident in the turnover of governments for the next several decades. The military leaders who competed for political control had similar backgrounds. The Prime Ministers from 1938 to 1976 were all born within a 14-year period and were from the same generation that staged the first coup in 1932; also, all Prime Ministers until 1991 except one attended one of four schools: the military academy, Suan Kulap, Assumption, or the Ministry of Justice law school.[51] Succession of governments was the result of shifts in political power based on personal relationships rather than organized processes like elections. Contrary to popular belief, no discernable pattern occurred for succession of governments by election or by coup for the several decades following the 1932 coup. Sources commonly refer to 16 coups occurring between 1932 and 1991, but there is not a commonly accepted list of these events because no one can claim the single authority to define a coup. The history of Prime Ministers from the government acknowledges at most 12 coups d'état.[52] The military effectively established a standard format for the coup, in which politicians are placed under house arrest, martial law is declared, bureaucrats continue to work, and a new government is eventually promulgated.[53] With repetition of the pattern, the coup became a repertoire in Thailand's politics.

No matter how many Constitutions were written with democracy as a pretense, democratic forms did not take hold in Thailand. The next Constitution enacted inevitably failed to instill a set of rules for future legitimate governance; it would be written to ensure the currently ruling party would remain in power.[54] The military leaders' competition for power through coups replaced the palace politics of the past and was

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51 James Ockey, "Thai Society and Patterns of Political Leadership," Asian Survey 36, no. 4 (April 1996), http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645403, 348 (accessed September 19, 2010).

52 "History of Thai Prime Ministers," March 7, 2011, http://www.cabinet.thaigov.go.th/eng/pm_his.htm (accessed September 19, 2010).

53 Thomas, "Limited Disengagement of the Military from Thai Politics," 113.

54 Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country and Constitutions*, 7.

legitimated by the monarchy and the support of the civil service.[55]   The pattern continued, and the legitimacy and justification for the military's reign shifted to suit the needs of a political military.

D.   THE REINSTATEMENT AND RISE OF THE MONARCHY'S POLITICAL AUTHORITY

Several factors underlie how the military would remain in power over the several decades following the 1932 coup.   Critically important was the restoration of the monarchy, which provided a lasting source of legitimacy from the Thai people to military rule.   A shifting notion of security to development and anticommunism further justified the military's need for direct involvement in internal politics.   The relationship with the monarchy and the concept of national security influenced the military's sense of professionalism and continuing role in governance.

After the 1957 coup, Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat as Prime Minister returned the monarchy the top of Thai governance.   The monarchy was reinstated, celebrated throughout the world, and supported the military's leadership in governance.   The relationship was mutually beneficial for Sarit and the monarchy:

> As Thak said, this alliance was a pragmatic secularization of power and leadership.   In his sphere, the king was allowed all the sources of legitimization he needed.   In return, Sarit as prime minister enjoyed the cosmological sanction of the throne, managing the country "on behalf of" the throne, and in doing so deriving his own public legitimacy.   This was a momentous shift.   As a foundation of its power, the palace traded the constitution for partnership with the loyal military.   Royal interests would no longer be defended by princes or aristocrats but by common-born army generals.[56]

The restoration of the monarchy in the 1950s began a long period of an increasing role for the king as a national leader in Thai society and governance.   Maintaining the historical legitimacy of this form of political structure was important to the government, yet challenged by some in Thailand.   Jit Poumisak's reinterpretation of Thailand's

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55 Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, 481.

56 Handley, *The King Never Smiles*, 154.

history, popular among students and communists, was suppressed for equating the *sakdina* system to feudalism. As Craig Reynolds wrote, "In a state whose legitimacy continues to derive from the monarchy and the Buddhist Sangha the sakdina = feudalism sign can, under certain circumstances, be deemed a danger."[57] The military leaders suppressed Jit's history because of this perceived threat. Undermining the meaning of the monarchy by linking it to negative impressions of the past, Jit's history threatened the legitimacy of the monarchy's support to the military leaders, and incidentally supported a Marxist view of history that could justify its overthrow. Thus, Thailand's government recognized the connection of figurative and literal meanings in forms of governance, so the same leadership should have been capable of recognizing its own forms to be not as democratic as purported.

Also during the 1950s, the military began espousing a new justification for its direct involvement in politics. The requirements of national security would go further than protecting the borders to include development: "In Thailand, as in many developing countries, the military have historically considered themselves to be the protectors or defenders of national security as well as the developers or modernizers of society."[58] Improving the national economy required government involvement, and the military was the institution best poised to do so. By integrating national development with national security, the military enhanced its role in governance and the power of its bureaucracy. With this expanded concept of security, the military further entrenched itself in the political structure, which was administered by the military and legitimated by the returning monarchy, which was also focused on economic development.

The 1970s in Thailand would prove to be a turbulent period that instilled some lasting, although possibly contradictory, political reforms. During this period and thereafter, legitimacy for a government would require two critical elements: some form of representation of the people and the support of the traditional, charismatic king. The king's interest in securing the state and regime from communism led to his support of

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57 Craig J. Reynolds, *Thai Radical Discourse: The Real Face of Thai Feudalism Today* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1987), 150.

58 Wattanayagorn, "Thailand: The Elite's Shifting Conceptions of Security," 423.

Field Marshal Thanom Kittakachorn's government following the Sarit era from 1968 to 1973. Politically aware students rebelled against the abuses of Thanom's government in 1973 protests that turned violent. The disruption of law and order demanded a response from the government, but the king tacitly supported the students in order to quell the violence. This support from the king overshadowed whether the military respected the students' demands or feared a loss of legitimacy from repression: "Cooler heads refused to send their troops against civilian mobs."[59] The king's decision to side with the students permitted the most liberal form of representative government in Thailand's history to date, which lasted from 1973 to 1976. This action instilled two enduring requirements of Thai governance: parliamentary representation and the king's support. The latter would be necessary sooner. The openness of political space turned more violent as royalist conservatives clashed with liberal reformers in the mid-1970s. Ultimately, the king sided with the law and order provided by a military-led conservative movement over individual freedoms.[60] After the reactionary government lost favor, representative forms of governance would be used beginning the in 1980s. These forms would not result from a commitment to democratic principles but, instead, from practicality and survival for the military to remain in political power.

E.   **THE MILITARY, THE MONARCHY, AND THE APPEARANCE OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION**

Continuing the use of representative forms in the semi-democratic system of government during the 1980s was a strategic decision by the military leaders to remain in power. Communism posed a threat to the entire social and political structure of Thailand, but the reaction against communism ostracized moderate liberal reformers as "un-Thai" for not supporting the monarchy. The military-led government sought to bring in moderates who felt the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) was the only option for democratic expression. Opposing communism in Thailand not only kept substantial United States' support flowing, but also helped maintain the elites in power. In addition:

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59 Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 302.

60 Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country and Constitutions*, 173.

The principal reason why the military opted to relinquish its direct control over the body politic pertained to a belated recognition (on the part of the military) that a successful government response to the rapidly growing CPT insurgency would have to include a meaningful political component.[61]

Representative forms in government opened the political space for the moderate liberal reformers to return to Thai society and politics, but these forms were not the result of commitment to democratic principles: "Along with development and suppression building democratic institutions became a key pillar of the counterinsurgency strategy… Democracy was a policy, a weapon in a war."[62]

The semi-democratic election of General Prem Tinansuland to Prime Minister in 1980 ushered in a government that, over the next decade, ended the communist threat and appeared to be a period of democratic consolidation. The conservative middle class Thais may have preferred the technocrat-capable "demi-democracy."[63] However, politically aware Thais least favored this "limited/guided democracy."[64] Despite general instability in the political system, Prem's government maintained a period of regime stability for the military-monarchy alliance: "The King trusted Prem absolutely, seeing him as an incorruptible figure who shared his soft and understated approach, but who was a skilled alliance-builder and wielder of patronage."[65] Despite the instability in the political system, Prem's government maintained a period of regime stability for the military-monarchy alliance. Thailand in the 1980s seemed as though it could transition into a more complete democracy, but the illiberal nature of the political leadership meant that the quasi-representative forms were not sufficient for a substantive democratic transition.

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61 Thomas, "Limited Disengagement of the Military from Thai Politics," 117.

62 Ockey, "Thailand," 197.

63 Neil A. Englehart, "Democracy and the Thai Middle Class," Asian Survey 43, no. 2 (March/April, 2003): 256, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3557897 (accessed September 14, 2010).

64 Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country and Constitutions*, 15.

65 Duncan McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises in Thailand," *The Pacific Review* 18, no. 4 (2005): 507, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09512740500338937 (accessed August 27,2010).

F.   CORPORATE VALUES OF THAILAND'S MILITARY

In this view of Thailand's military up through the 1980s, three key themes emerge that are revealing about its identity and its values. These are intertwined and support one another such that a change in one would inherently impact the others. The first theme is that Thailand's military began as a political army and continues to operate as one despite democratic reforms. Thailand's modern military finds its beginnings in Siam in the eighteenth century and the consolidation of the present-day kingdom around the monarchy. Despite the appearance of a modern, bureaucratic structure, the social or political elite status necessary for entry into the officer corps installed a political nature in the force from its birth. The 1932 coup ended the absolute monarchy and installed the military as the new political elite. For the next several decades, Thailand's military sustained its authority through continuous involvement in governance. The repertoire of the coup became the means of determining new political leadership, and constitutions attempted to ensure political power for the leading group. Gradually, individuals of various backgrounds were able to rise through the ranks, but the military leadership remained a central element of the political elite. Shifts toward what appeared to be democracy were elite strategies, notably to quell student unrest and combat communism. The role of the military in governance instilled an identity as the guarantor of social order and privilege.

Secondly, the military supports a traditional monarchy as a primary source of its own political legitimacy. Although the coup of 1932 ended the reign of the last absolute monarch, the palace coup did not revolutionize the political structure. During the 1940s to 1950s, with little influence from the monarchy, the military continued to use the centralized structure and patrimonial character of the state with military leaders as the elite in the place of the monarchy. To bolster its position within this structure, the military brought the monarchy back in a mutually beneficial relationship that continues to support the centralized state. This arrangement is further supported by the religious structure of Thailand, which asserts that the king possesses the necessary dharma to be the nation's leader. The monarch as father of the nation is a necessary figure in Thai society; it is he who must show the nation what is right, provide discipline, and serve as a

role model and final arbiter. The military and the monarchy sustained this political partnership through the actions of the military, the monarchy, and the Privy Council. The popular support for the monarchy gives legitimacy to whomever or to whichever organization the monarchy supports as the political leader of the nation. The military supports this monarchy, which in turn promotes the military as necessary for order.

Thirdly, the notion of security in Thailand goes beyond defending the nation's borders. Once Thailand's neighbors were colonized and Siam was no longer under the same threat, the threats to the Thai state were predominantly internal rather than external. Steven David explains this as omnibalancing, which considers the balance of power for internal threats as much as external threats to the state and regime.[66] The security role for Thailand's military was in consolidating control over the periphery and defining and promoting national interests, which are inherently political. National security expanded to include development in the 1950s and incorporated political and economic reform to counter communism in the 1980s. Yet, maintaining the traditional political order also became a concern of national security. Under civilian political leadership in the early 1970s, violent clashes in society raised questions about the civilian government's ability to maintain law and order. Although (or perhaps because) this violence was spurred on by deposed military leaders, the military was perceived and perceived itself as necessary to restore order. Defending the political order ensures the monarchy's willingness and ability to support the military's role in governance.

The three values are interrelated in a way that redefines the notions of professionalism beyond the Huntington's objective control model. Thailand's military perceives that it must defend the political structure from internal and external threats. Threats to the hybrid structure of Thai politics compromise the military's ability to defend the state, nation, and monarchy. Political power is necessary for the military to defend the state and guarantee social order. The structure of the social and political system bestows the responsibility for order to the leaders of the nation, and the military

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66 Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991), http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010472 (accessed March 16, 2011).

and monarchy alliance holds itself in that role of responsibility. Collectively, these three values of Thailand's military shape its interests and, thus, the actions it takes.

G.   CONCLUSION

Reviewing the involvement of Thailand's military in governance through two periods of apparent democratic consolidation in the 1930s to 1940s and the 1970s reveals a history of a political army whose values are traditional and patrimonial in nature. Thailand was founded on a royalist elite political structure with a military that supported it. The political structure, and social order, found its legitimacy in traditional, patron-client relationships. The European style of a modern, bureaucratic state was imposed by the monarchy on top of this traditional legitimacy. The military's intervention in 1932 failed to disrupt this structure and, instead, imbedded the military's leadership within it. The traditional paternalism that created Thailand retained more political currency than the rational-legal systems of legitimacy. The "birthright principle" and Thai concept of military professionalism permits political activity and helps explain the military's continued participation in politics. From this sustained participation in governance, a set of values for the military emerged. These values include a concept of national security of defending not only borders, but also the traditional monarchy as the primary source of political legitimacy and the necessity of political power over social order and development for military effectiveness. The values and their interrelationship shape the military's interests and help explain its actions in governance in Thailand, both historically and today.

III.   1991 COUP

A.   INTRODUCTION

The characterization of the 1991 coup in Thailand as an anachronistic attempt by the military to reestablish its prominence in Thailand's politics only describes part of the scene. The coup resulted from a simultaneous occurrence of civilian failures and military strengths. The balance of the political forces that supported the semi-democracy of the 1980s fell apart when Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhawan's elected civilian government took office in 1989. A perception of civilian incompetence and political stalemate put his government in a weak political position. At the same time, the military remained strong within the state and retained its political mindset. The source of power for the new, elected government and its exercising of its authority challenged the military's values and role within the government. When this government threatened the military's interests in cabinet positions and appointments, in particular, the military stepped in with the initial consent of the middle class and the monarchy.

The events that led up to the 1991 coup contain a combination of factors that cause coups as described by Karsten and Koonings and Krujit. Koonings and Krujit's three principles of birthright, civilian incompetence, and military competence each are demonstrated.[67] Karsten's factors of political stalemate, affronts to military values, and direct threats to military interests were each part of the military's decision to step in.[68] The combination of these factors was necessary before the coup could occur; it appears that no single factor was able to precipitate the coup on its own. The complexity of the events begins with the administration preceding Chatichai's elected government coming into office.

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67 Koonings and Kruijt, *Political Armies*, 19.

68 Karsten, "The Coup d'Etat in Competitive Democracies," 233.

B.   GENERAL PREM'S SEMI-DEMOCRACY: PRELUDE

In the wake of the reactionary military rule following the 1973–76 period of liberal democracy, the political elites in Thailand reached a balance of power. The 1978 Constitution created a semi-democratic system. The parliament consisted of an elected lower house and a senate that mostly had been appointed by the king and contained a large number of military leaders. General Prem Tinansulanond came into office with military support within the senate in his favor. The former general was not an elected official, but he staffed his cabinet with members of the major parties to ensure majority support within the elected house.[69] The middle class accepted Prem for his integrity, and in the belief that he could limit corruption from the top.[70] The semi-democratic system succeeded with its selection of a leader who was acceptable to variety of groups and who could balance the prevailing political forces.

Despite the limitations on democratic participation, Thailand in the 1980s experienced some political liberalization. With the steady, strong growth of the economy, civil society and business interests and their influence in politics also grew. In the final years of the 1980s, Thailand became Asia's "Fifth Tiger" with double-digit growth in gross domestic product and a 50 percent increase in per capita income.[71] Various groups of civil society became involved in the political process and influenced the very constitution of the government and the state.[72] The liberalization of politics appeared promising by the end of the decade, but some of the fundamental qualities of democracy were still absent. Professor Chai-Anan Samutwanit wrote that, by 1990, the structure of politics in Thailand was a balance of bureaucratic and nonbureaucratic

69 Suchit Bunbongkarn, "Elections and Democratization in Thailand," in *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert H. Taylor, 189 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

70 Anek Laothamatas, "A Tale of Two Democracies: Conflicting Perceptions of Elections and Democracy in Thailand," in *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert H. Taylor, 212 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

71 Antonia Hussey, "Rapid Industrialization in Thailand 1986–1991," *Geographical Review* 83, no. 1 (January 1993), http://www.jstor.org/stable/215377 (accessed March 8, 2011).

72 For a select review of influential groups, see Kevin Hewison, "Of Regimes, States and Pluralities: Thai Politics Enters the 1990s," in *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy and Capitalism*, eds. Kevin Hewison, Richard Robison and Garry Rodan (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993).

forces, each seeking to maximize its power.[73] This system was unlikely to produce a pluralist democracy, and a coup was still considered an acceptable means of transferring power.[74] The political position of civil society and business interests grew stronger against the state through the economic growth and political stability of the decade.

While civil society and business involvement were growing, the military retained its strong position in Thai society. General Prem, even after officially leaving the military, was able to keep the support of the army leaders through strong leadership, patronage, and ties to the palace. The military was involved throughout the nation in its anticommunist campaign, but its leadership in Bangkok was fractured over the future of the nation and the military. The counterinsurgency campaign against the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) promulgated democratic forms and other persuasive tactics as a means of diverting the liberally minded Thai away from the CPT, and the campaign succeed by 1986. During the 1980s, however, several factions of military officers had become politically active and, on two occasions, one faction attempted to unseat Prem from office by coups. Prem was able to remain in office by retaining the favor of the monarchy and by the actions of loyal senior officers. Under Prem's leadership, the military as a whole was in a strong position throughout Thailand, but fractures in its leadership kept the military politically limited.

The 1980s in Thailand under the Prem administration saw relative stability, but the balance was precarious. Sukhumbhand Paribatra explains that the 1978 Constitution lasted for 12 years for three reasons: divisiveness within the armed forces, the ability of individual political leaders, and the strong legitimizing force of the monarchy.[75] Prem's strength over each of these factors kept the government stable. After Prem stepped down in 1988, Chatichai's elected administration would soon upset the balance.

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73 Chaianan Samutwanit, "Thailand: A Stable Semidemocracy," *in Politics in Developing Countries: Comparing Experiences with Democracy*, eds. Larry Jay Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, 306 (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner Publishers, 1990).

74 Ibid., 306.

75 Sukhumbhand Paribatra, "State and Society in Thailand: How Fragile the Democracy?" *Asian Survey* 33, no. 9 (September 1993): 886, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645235 (accessed January 7, 2011).

## C.	CHATICHAI'S GOVERNMENT: THE CIVILIAN FACTORS

In 1988, Chatichai's entrance into government appeared to be a successful consolidation of democratic forms. With a shift in political support in Parliament, the unelected Prem stepped down to permit the elected Chatichai into the office of Prime Minister. The politicians in Parliament had greatly benefited from growth in civil society and the business community.[76] Through established networks of vote collectors, business interests were able to gather votes in rural areas that sought immediate returns for their representation in Parliament.[77] Chatichai was not accepted in the same manner as Prem by the urban middle class, which raised questions about the integrity of the new politicians with their business interests. Accusations of corruption and vote buying came nearly immediately after Chatichai took office.[78] The corruption accusations challenged the legitimacy of the leaders elected by the democratic forms, but this represented more the frustration with the person selected by the process than the faults of the process itself. The change in the source of power for the government (from bureaucratic to elected), the capabilities of the new government, and the actions taken to retain power all served to upset the balance of power that had supported Prem's administration.

### 1.	Civilian Incompetence and Political Stalemate

Political stalemate grew in part out of the incompetence of the democratically elected government. Karsten links the factor of political stalemate with Koonings and Krujit's civilian incompetence principle by providing examples of physical attacks on opposition parties' members and continuous reforming of governments, both of which indicate the inability to compromise and permit a loyal opposition to operate.[79] The elected government demonstrated incompetence through failed government programs and its inability to retain political support. Political stalemate resulted from the erosion of political support coupled with efforts to maintain control in office.

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76 Bunbongkarn, "Elections and Democratization in Thailand," 190.

77 Ibid., 194.

78 Laothamatas, "A Tale of Two Democracies," 212.

79 Karsten, *Civil-Military Relations*, 227.

Chatichai, a former general, entered office under the political strength of the parties in 1988, but his administration was unable to retain that strong position. Several failures of government plans led Thais to believe the new government was less capable than Prem's had been. The king's speech in 1990 referred to several infrastructure projects that would have benefited from a more flexible government.[80] A good number of parliamentarians were "poorly educated rural politicians who were able to deliver votes but were perceived by the middle class voters as entering politics solely to make money through kickbacks."[81] The mindset of the politicians affected the democratic process as well. The political parties failed to institutionalize as actual representatives of the people, and the politicians "failed to assume the responsibilities of governance in a constructive, clean and efficient manner."[82] The incompetence of the elected officials led to political stalemate.

The political stalemate of Chatichai's government was in large part a failure to maintain the support of the electorate and the monarchy. The political stalemate in this case is the "conflicting expectations of elections, politicians, and democratic government itself of two major social forces—the urban, educated middle class and the rural farmers or peasants."[83] This failure resulted from the competition for understanding democracy's operating principles for Thailand by those promoting the use of its forms. The middle class challenged cabinet members on accusations of corruption; the military challenged cabinet members for their offenses against the military. The military called on the Prime Minister to remove a cabinet member, Foreign Policy advisor Sukhombhand Partibatra, after his statements that the military academy's curriculum should be revised, which

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80 Bhumibol Adulyadej, "Royal Speech on the Occasion of the Royal Birthday" (speech, Dusadalai Hall, Chitralada Villa, Dusit Palace, Thailand, December 4, 1990), http://www.ohmpps.go.th (accessed January 07, 2011).

81 Englehart, "Democracy and the Thai Middle Class," 256.

82 Paribatra, "State and Society in Thailand," 884.

83 Laothamatas, "A Tale of Two Democracies," 202.

implied the military should be less political.[84] To ward off a coup, Chatichai named General Chaovalit as defense minister, for which he stepped down as army commander.[85]

Eventually, the monarchy lost confidence in the elected government, as reflected in the king's remarks that democracy does not always produce the best results.[86] The king's birthday speech of 1990 marked a departure of support for the Chatichai's administration.[87] In an attempt to retain office, Chatichai reshuffled his cabinet again. In December 1990, the third cabinet within four months included a shift in the coalition of ruling parties, but it also marked a weakening of support for Chatichai in Parliament.[88] The reshuffles also included an attempt to revive the career for one of the military's rivals as a check on its political power.[89] Chaticahi could not remain in power without the support of the politicians who opposed the leaders in the military.[90] The continuous reshuffling of the cabinet reflected the attempt by Chatichai's administration to maintain power when neither the middle class nor the military felt represented in the cabinet. The contending sources of political power were unable to reach a compromise, and the political stalemate debilitated the government to the point that the monarchy removed its support.

The political support for Chatichai was capable of bringing the elected officials into power but was not able to keep them there. The business interests that characterized the elected government came in conflict with the democratic principles of the middle class and the traditional interests of the military and monarchy. While able to gather votes for elections, the politicians were not competent in office to demonstrate they

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84 Rodney Tasker, "Adviser Axed," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 145, no. 33 (1989), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=5389998&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed January 7, 2011).

85 Handley, *The King Never Smiles*, 335.

86 Adulyadej, "Royal Speech on the Occasion of the Royal Birthday," 5.

87 Handley, *The King Never Smiles*, 338.

88 Rodney Tasker, "Seeds of Destruction," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 150, no. 52 (1990), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=5390862&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed March 7, 2011).

89 Ibid., 338.

90 Interview in Bangkok with Thai political science professor, 2 March 2011.

should be there. The resulting political stalemate weakened the position of the civilian government against the increasing political strength of the military. This shift in political power created the opportunity for the military to step in.

D.   THE MILITARY'S MINDSET

While the elected government was losing legitimacy among the educated middle class, the military also posed a strong political challenge. The military's actions against the Chatichai government represent the factors of Kooning and Krujit's military competence and Karsten's affronts to military values. The military's competence and perceived ability to lead resulted from the strongest unity in leadership within the force since 1976 and from the position of the state in society, resulting from the anticommunist campaign providing the rhetoric of defending democracy and nation. The affronts to the military's values by the Chatichai government included the changing role of the military within the government and the perceived challenges to the military's leaders from the politicians. The relative political strength of the military against the elected government helped create the military's desire to step in.

1.   Military Competence: Unity and Ability

The competence and strength of Thailand's military was enhanced by its effectiveness against the CPT. The counterinsurgency campaign from the military-led government of the 1980s put the military in a position of defending national security by promoting its limited version of democracy. Despite some factionalism since the authoritarian governments of the early and late 1970s, the Thai officers had the common beliefs that communism posed the greatest threat to the institutions that are essential for national security—nation, religion, and monarchy—and that political intervention was an acceptable means to suppress these threats.[91] During the 1980s, prime minister's orders No. 66/2523 and No. 66/2525 made evident the Army's strategy to control the rural population rather than suppressing them: "The former was known as the policy to defeat the Communist Party of Thailand, which state that to destroy the CPT it was necessary to

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91 Paribatra, "State and Society in Thailand," 885.

establish a truly democratic regime."[92] The military controlled the semi-democratic process, ensuring it was conservative and representative but not truly participatory; and the military officials remained in office until the late 1980s.[93] Although electoral reforms permitted more liberal involvement in politics, they did not result in genuine democratic reforms.[94] The military's efforts extended the project Connors labels "democrasubjection," in which the elites in Thailand gave the impression of democracy while actually controlling its outcomes.[95] With the state's control of the electoral outcomes, "these bureaucracies also had a propensity to see politicians and voluntary political participation as potential threats, not only to their roles and functions but also to the nations 'true' interests."[96] Although the state's direct role in politics undermined the genuine nature of the democracy, the political process in Thailand was increasingly liberal in comparison to the regimes of the 1960s and 1970s. The military benefited from the perception of opening political space while maintaining competent rule. Further, its control over the spread of democratic forms gave the military the use of rhetoric about defending democracy.[97]

The unity of the military reached a high point when Class Five ascended to the top posts in the Army in 1989.[98] The unity of leadership was a departure from the factionalism of the 1980s: "This meant that, for the first time since 1973, the military and especially the Army, while not free of factionalism, was effectively under the control of one group."[99] Class Five had been challenged by the Thai Young Turks, who represented a younger generation of officers, led by Class Seven, seeking a more

92 Samutwanit, "Thailand: A Stable Semidemocracy," 297–8.

93 Ockey, "Thailand," 197.

94 Paribatra, "State and Society in Thailand," 884.

95 Michael Kelly Connors, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

96 Paribatra, "State and Society in Thailand," 885.

97 Connors, *Democracy and National Identity in Thailand*, 118.

98 Class numbers refer to the sequential graduating classes from the Royal Chulachomklao Military Academy. For development of "classmate politics" see Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *The Thai Young Turks* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

99 Hewison, "Of Regimes, States and Pluralities," 166.

professional, less politicized military force. The factionalism had resulted from different interpretations of what were the threats to national security, but the ideal of defending the national institutions never wavered. The coup attempts of 1981 and 1985 were consistent with the impression that military intervention was an acceptable means of defending the nation's interests by seizing the authority to define the threats. Each coup attempt stood down when Prem demonstrated he retained the support of the monarchy.[100] The result of the coup attempts was the removal of involved officers from Class Seven. To solidify his relationship with the military leadership in 1989, Chatichai permitted the military, under General Chaovalit Yongchaiyut, to select its own promotions; and Chaovalit promoted members of Class Five, "the largest, most cohesive class in the higher reaches of the military."[101] When Chaovalit stepped down to take political office, Class Five was left without rival in the military.[102] The military, which had a strong sense of protection of national interests, was left without an internal rival in interpreting what really posed the threats to the nation.

By 1988, Thailand's military held a strong position in Thai society due to the success against the CPT, its effective rule, liberalizing political space, and the monarchy's continued support of its leaders. With no factional divisions remaining, unity within the military was at a high point. The attitude of the leadership may then determine how the military would respond to the elected government, its processes, and its actions.

2. Affronts to Military Values: The Leaders and Their Role in Government

The leadership that ascended to the top Army positions during Chaitichai's administration had represented a particular disposition toward politicians. Military leaders had an expectation they could participate, if not lead, in government. General Chaovalit, as army commander, planned to eventually become Prime Minister but had to

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100 Suwannathat-Pian, *Kings, Country and Constitutions*, 175.

101 Rodney Tasker, "Class Warfare," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 145, no. 39 (1989), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=437218&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed January 11, 2011).

102 For summary of events on inter-clique rivalry, see Hewison, "Of Regimes, States and Pluralities."

change tack in response to the unexpected, initial stability of Chatichai's government.[103] Meanwhile, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, while deputy army commander, made clear his feelings toward elected officials: "Suchinda said he would not submit to politicians 'because I have dignity.'…I do not bow to politicians…If I were the army commander-in-chief, there must be no conditions attached. The power must be in my hands."[104] These traditional views of the military in government extended to most of the other members of Class Five, whose class president was Suchinda. Hewison explains:

> Class 5 developed a cohesiveness necessary to counter the Young Turks, who they felt had been disrespectful towards senior officers (Suchit 1987; FEER 1 August 1991). By extension, this perceived impertinence suggested that the Young Turks had stepped outside the old structures of authority and political activity, while Class 5 craved a return to more traditional values. This group…reflected the traditional military view that a government relying on parliamentary support was inherently unstable. Consequently, such governments were seen as a threat to national security (Chai-Anan 1990: 185).[105]

The military leadership, which came into its top positions by 1990, unified and unchallenged, already held a particular contempt for the uncertainty of democratic processes and the politicians it contained.

Chatichai's entering office was not only at odds with the attitudes of the traditional military leaders, but also represented a change in the source of power within the electoral political system. Fewer positions reserved for officers threatened the military's position within the democratic process that it had previously controlled. "For these conservatives, the Chatichai government, the parliamentary form, and the logic of its operations represented the essence of the capitalist revolution and embodied the spirit of change in society, and promised political participation which was wider than the

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103 Paisal Sricharatchanya, "Best-Laid Plans," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 143, no. 4 (1989), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=455069&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed January 11, 2011).

104 Rodney Tasker, "General Alert," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 147, no. 13 (1990), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=448478&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed January 11, 2011).

105 Hewison, "Of Regimes, States and Pluralities," 165.

technocratic authoritarianism they preferred."[106]   Even more so, with a change in the source of electoral power came a shift in the committees of power within the government. Chai-Anan notes:

> Instead of relying on and consulting with the NESDB [National Economic and Social Development Board] and the JPPCC [Joint Public-Private Consultative Committee], as Prem had always done when making major economic policy decisions, Chaitichai preferred to establish direct links with individual members of the business community and to keep decision-making closer to his cabinet of elected politicians."[107]

The promotion of an elected civilian politician to Prime Minister meant a change within the electoral source of power and a change in the groups that influenced the Prime Minister's decisions, including who sat in the cabinet and led key agencies.   Both developments threatened the traditional role of the bureaucracy and the military within the government.

The roles of the military and the bureaucracy within the government and its decisions were seriously compromised during Chatichai's administration.   Up to that point, the military and bureaucracy had controlled the political outcomes and were unified in the ability to determine what was best for the nation.   This mindset was pervasive in the military of the 1980s, but no longer was the bureaucracy the primary source of power for the officials.   Further, the leadership of the military had a particular contempt for the politicians.   Suchinda and Class Five rose to the top of their field by countering attempts to disrupt the traditional system.   Contempt for the politicians also existed among the middle-class supporters of democratic ideals, who were frustrated by the politicians' blatantly corrupt practices.   A particular threat to the military would soon occur that would represent the threats to these values and signify the weakening political position of Chatichai's government.   The military could then justify stepping in.

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106 Kevin Hewison, "Political Oppositions and Regime Change in Thailand," in *Political Oppositions in Industrialising Asia*, ed. Garry Rodan, 82 (London: Routledge, 1996).

107 Chaianan Samutwanit, "Old Soldiers Never Die, They Are Just Bypassed: The Military, Bureaucracy and Globalisation," in *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*, ed. Kevin Hewison, 52 (London: Routledge, 1997).

E.   IMMEDIATE CAUSES: DIRECT THREATS TO MILITARY INTERESTS

By 1991, the conditions were set that established the elected government and the military as opposing political forces. Chatichai's government represented capitalist business interests, and the corrupt practices for those interests weakened the government's political position and contributed to a loss of legitimacy from the middle class that supported democratic ideals. Suchinda's military represented the traditional values, sought to continue the strength of the Thai state, which had promoted semi-democracy for the previous decade, and was the most unified in leadership since the reactionary authoritarianism of the late 1970s. A threat by the government to the immediate interests of the military could now precipitate military intervention. Conflict occurred over Chatichai's nominations for defense leaders, who were unacceptable to Suchinda. The attempted appointments embodied the political struggle between the government and the military for their immediate and long-term consequences, which thus compelled the military to step in.

Before the coup, Chatichai and his cabinet had publicly clashed with the military several times about the appointment of cabinet members. On two occasions, clashes over the cabinet nearly resulted in the military staging a coup. The resignation of Sukhumbhand Paribatra and naming of Chaovalit as defense minister resulted from a rally of thousands of military officers in Bangkok.[108] When Chaovalit as defense minister was accused in Parliament of corruption, Suchinda called a meeting with Prem, and by extension the monarchy, and Chatichai. The monarchy's support remained with Chatichai, but Chaovalit was left out of the cabinet reshuffle.[109] In November of 1990, Suchinda made another unsuccessful move against Chatichai to demand the removal of another cabinet member, Chalem Yubamrung; Chatichai retained the minister as an apparent stand against military interference.[110] Despite Suchinda's taking over capitol

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108 Handley, *The King Never Smiles*, 335.

109 Ibid., 336.

110 Rodney Tasker, "Generals Outflanked," Far Eastern Economic Review 150, no. 49 (Dec 6, 1990), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=454452&Fmt=7& clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed January 11, 2011).

security, a meeting of the two directly with the king left Chatichai in office once again.[111] As long as the elected government retained the support of the monarchy, the military remained limited in its political influence over the cabinet. Cabinet positions, however, were clearly valued by the military leaders, and Chatichai continually battled with military over these appointments.

By the end of 1990, the king's favor shifted away from the elected government. The king's review of the military and his birthday speech indicated more support for the military and "traditional Thai forms" with less support for the government and "Western" methods.[112] Chatichai, his cabinet again, and his appointments directly assaulted the military's political sensitivities and, this time, the monarchy as well. Chatichai revived the career of Major General Manoon Roopkachorn, a rival of Class Five in disgrace for his involvement in the 1981 and 1985 coup attempts.[113] The army leaders renewed an accusation that implicated Manoon in an assassination plot against Prem and the Queen.[114] Chatichai attempted to appoint General Arthit Kamplangek to work with Charlem on proving the accusations against Manoon were groundless.[115] Arthit was previously supported by Class Five and was key in suppressing the failed coup attempts, but he had also restored Manoon after the first attempt.[116] In the contested issue of appointments and cabinet positions, Chatichai moved to install someone senior to the army leaders. Suchinda took action before the appointment could take place by arresting Chatichai and Arthit before their flight to visit the king departed.[117] The resulting coup received an almost popular welcome as the middle class and monarchy had removed their

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111 Handley, *The King Never Smiles*, 337.

112 Ibid., 337.

113 Hewison, "Of Regimes, States and Pluralities," 167.

114 Suchit Bunbongkarn, "Thailand in 1991: Coping with Military Guardianship," *Asian Survey* 32, no. 2 (1992): 132,
http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1861554&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD, (accessed January 11, 2011).

115 Ibid., 133.

116 Hewison, "Of Regimes, States and Pluralities," 166–7.

117 Rodney Tasker, "Popular Putsch," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 151, no. 10 (1991),
http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=434670&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 1, 2011).

support for the elected government.[118] The tradition-minded coup leaders continued the historic pattern. As with previous coups in their bloodless form, the National Peacekeeping Council (NPKC) nullified the constitution, named an interim government, and continued the operations of the state.

F.   ANALYSIS

1.   Factors Present for the 1991 Coup

More than this single incident of the attempted appointment of a rival-faction former general was necessary to precipitate a coup. A combination of factors, as suggested by Karsten, Koonings, and Krujit existed within the political events of Thailand in 1991. Two of the suggested factors, however, either were not present or were not actually indicative of a coup. Recognizing the combination present for the 1991 coup but absent from the preceding twelve years contributes to the understanding of the necessary factors for future coups.

Kooning and Krujit provide three principle conditions for military intervention: the birthright principle, civilian incompetence, and military competence. Each of these was a necessary, but not singularly sufficient, condition for the 1991 coup. The birthright principle informed the perception by the bureaucracy and the military of their central role in Thai society and even in spreading a conservative form of democracy. Further, the particular mindset of the military leadership in 1991 espoused traditional values for the government. The elected government proved its incompetence as technocrats through the failure of government plans, unlike the previous administrations led by General Prem. The king cited these failures in his speech that removed his political support for Chatichai's government. Finally, the military appeared to be a competent organization in comparison.   Having recently succeeded against the CPT, the counterinsurgency campaign heavily laden with its persuasive tactics opened political space under the

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118 Tasker, "Popular Putsch."

military's rule. The military appeared capable as the defenders of national interests and supporters of democratic processes. Each of these principles for military intervention was present at the time of the coup.

Several of Karsten's factors were also present leading into the coup: political stalemate, affronts to military values, and direct threats to military interests. Political stalemate of the elected government resulted from the loss of democratic support. The goals of democracy conflicted between the middle class seeking liberal ideals and technical competence and the lower class seeking regional benefits from the national government.[119] As Chatichai's administration lost the support of the military and the monarchy, the political stalemate was demonstrated by the consistent reshuffling of the cabinet to retain power. The interests represented in the cabinet and the practices of the elected administration left the bureaucracy and military less involved in the policy-making process, where they previously had been prominent. Thailand's military, which considered a strong state necessary for the greater institutions of nation, religion, and monarchy, took offense to their weakened position within the government. Although the military leaders already had the mindset that the military should lead the nation politically, the coup did not occur until the civilian government was politically weak and attempted to assert control directly over the military's interests. During the 1980s, Prem's administration maintained its political strength over the military leaders who twice attempted to depose him. When the last cabinet reshuffle of Chatichai's weakened administration attempted to check the military's political position, the direct threat to the military's interests pushed the situation over the edge. All of these factors together were necessary to inspire Thailand's military to take action.

2. Factors Not Present for the 1991 Coup

Two other factors from Karsten—economic distress and corruption—were not relevant for the 1991 coup in Thailand. Economic distress was certainly not characteristic of Thailand through the 1980s, and corruption later proved not to be a genuine cause for the coup. The 1980s, and much of the 1990s, proved to be a period of

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119 Laothamatas, "A Tale of Two Democracies," 212.

consistently strong economic growth in Thailand. Economic growth facilitated the liberalization of politics with the growth of civil society and eventually the business interests. Economic strength supported the corrupt practices that compromised the democratic forms of the elected government.

Corruption was the reason cited as driving the coup by the National Peacekeeping Council and the reason accepted by the middle class who welcomed the intervention. However, corruption in politics existed before and after the Chatichai administration. The middle class acknowledged that Prem's government also had corruption, but Prem had the integrity to hold corruption within limits.[120] The middle class did not have the same perception of integrity for Chatichai, so corruption became a focal point. The events of 1992 proved that the military's interest to retain power outweighed its position against corruption. For example, in an effort to retain a government coalition, the Suchinda-led administration incorporated some of the same corrupt officials whom the military investigated immediately following the coup.[121] The interim Prime Minister Anand Punyarachun even acknowledged that corruption was still a part of life in Thailand, although widely abhorred; corruption was merely an excuse used to justify the military's coup, which worked due to the disaffection with corrupted electoral politics.[122] Corruption certainly existed in Thailand's politics leading into the coup, and provided the excuse for staging the coup. Corruption provided the excuse to complain about the undesirable outcome of the elected government, a Prime Minister considered lacking in integrity. Corruption's role in politics before, during, and after Chatichai's government indicates that corruption itself was not an actual factor for the military's intervention.

3. Counterfactuals

Several factors came together in Thailand's politics to precipitate a coup at this point in time. The combination of these factors was necessary, and the absence of one could have avoided the coup. Outcomes other than a coup were possible under suggested

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120 Laothamatas, "A Tale of Two Democracies," 212.

121 Bunbongkarn, "Elections and Democratization in Thailand," 198–199.

122 Paribatra, "State and Society in Thailand," 891.

alternative conditions for the political competence of the elected government, the role of the bureaucracy and military within the new government, and the unity and political strength of the military at the time of the coup.

Chatichai's elected government suffered political stalemate resulting from the middle class' rejection of his officials as incompetent and corrupt. The practices and interests of the elected officials offended the middle class, who sought real democracy and the military leaders who had traditional values. The withdrawal of support by these groups culminated in the king's speech, which indicated the monarchy's removal of support. The poor public perception of the government left the monarchy unable to defend the elected leaders. The king's birthday speech just prior to the coup indicated a lack of support for a democratic system that could not produce results for the people. As the voice for the nation, and as the revered head of the state, the king's withdrawal of support for the elected government indicated the withdrawal of the nation's support. The loss of support opened the opportunity for the military. Not until the king expressed dissatisfaction with the elected government's incompetence did the military succeed in stepping in. In essence, incompetence and low public opinion alone were not enough.

The military and the bureaucracy had been accustomed to having a role in policy formation until Chatichai's administration. Chatichai preferred using direct contacts with elected politicians and business leaders rather than the bureaucratic committees that had previously made national policy decisions. Thus, confrontation occurred over cabinet positions and appointments that could influence the policy decisions. Repeatedly Chatichai was under pressure from the military over this. If Chatichai had been willing to include the military and the bureaucracy in the policy decision process, the military leaders would not have had the same foundation for considering the power of the state was eroding in favor of corrupt business interests. To the military, the strength of the state was a vital national interest. If the Chatichai administration could have co-opted the military's interests in retaining the power of the state, the confrontation over cabinet positions would have less meaning to the military leaders.

The loss of Chaovalit from the cabinet proved to be the last check on the Class Five leadership. Nominating Arthit challenged the military's political position by

attempting to revive the career of the Class Seven leader, Manoon. Without the inter-clique rivalry left within the service, the claim by the military over the nation's interests was left unchallenged by others in the military's leadership. Any of the military's factions accepted that a coup could be necessary to defend the nation's institutions, but the success of a coup was less likely when opposed within the military. The Class Five leadership included the officers who stopped the Class Seven coup attempts of the 1980s, and they were promoted as a highly unified leadership without an internal rival. If the Chatichai government had not lost the check on the military in the first place or had successfully maintained factional rivalry within the service, then Chatichai may have found support within the ranks against the leading group. Without a factional rivalry, Chatichai sought to regain political control over the military leaders through an appointment. The clear attempt to impose a political check on the military, by a nomination that furthered the appearance of corruption, was the tipping point for the coup.

Several alternative paths were possible for the Chatichai administration. Resolving the perception of corruption by the middle class could have prevented the loss of legitimacy and the removal of support by the king. Moderating the actual political position of the elected offices within the state and thus maintaining a role for the bureaucracy and military within the government would have made civilian control over the government by the elected officials less threatening to the military leaders. Preventing any single group from having complete politically unified control over the military would have maintained the fractures within the service, which prevented earlier coups.

G. CONCLUSION

For a variety of reasons, the elected government in Thailand in 1991 was unable to hold on to political power. The technocratic incompetence and political stalemate by the elected government eroded the support of the middle class and the monarchy. The opportunity opened for the military to be in a stronger political position. The competence of the military resulted from its counterinsurgency success in spreading democratic forms

and the unity of a single faction leading the services. The key to the 1991 coup was that the particular leaders also represented a traditional set of values that supported a strong state position in society and a political army that is entitled to and best capable of leading the nation. This mindset of military leaders included an underlying value that existed in the various factions of the 1980s, but one faction was left unchecked and in an advantageous position by 1991. The politically weakened elected government challenged the military's values by removing its role in policy making and the immediate interests of the military by attempting to check its unity and political position. The combination of these factors in Thailand in 1991 permitted and compelled the military to step in against the elected government.

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IV.   2006 COUP

A.   INTRODUCTION

Thailand's coup of 2006 had a different character from the previous coup, but many of the same conditions existed. Civilian incompetence led to political stalemate. The stalemate opened the opportunity for the military to take action. The military had appeared to become less political yet maintained a strong, competent position in Thailand's society. Leading up to the coup, the military experienced a resurgence of royalist support within the leadership, and the expanding influence of Thaksin challenged the values of this faction. The elected government's challenge to the military's interests again took the form of influencing the promotion process. Thaksin's influence on the military reshuffle would have shored up his control over politics, so the military again took action under the guise of defending democracy.

B.   1990s AND THE ELECTION OF THAKSIN SHINAWATRA

Politics in Thailand through the 1990s reflected a shift in political authority away from traditional bureaucratic and military elites toward democratic forms including more of a role from civil society and business. The attempt by the military to retain power after the 1991 coup led to a middle-class uprising during May 1992 in a clear rejection of the military leadership. By calling the competing factional leaders—the newly elected Prime Minister, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, and Chamlong Srimuang, the former governor of Bangkok and leader of an opposition party—to prostrate before him, the monarchy rose in stature and brought about a political compromise. The new government returned to the semi-democratic form of elected and appointed leaders, which entrenched the positions of the network monarchy led by the head of the Privy Council, General Prem Tinandsuland. Network monarchy refers to the network-based politics and intervention into the political system by the monarchy, usually through a

proxy like Prem, with the interest of ensuring the "right person" is in place.[123] The gradual trend toward more democracy would continue throughout the decade. The financial crisis of 1997 permitted the biggest step toward democracy with the passing of the more participatory and competitive "People's Constitution." Through the 1990s, Thailand's military had a shrinking role in politics, and the forms of democracy were on the rise.

The rules of politics changed with the 1997 Constitution, which was to serve as a significant boost for democratic consolidation. A confluence of internal and external interests in developing democracy brought about the passage of the new constitution; and the divergence of those interests eventually led to the failure of genuine consolidation.[124] Democracy in Thailand could still be considered the project of elites to legitimate their control over the strong state institutions. The new form of this project in the 1990s was the national myth of a democratic state that is responsive to a participant, plural citizenry who are mediated by the traditional institutions.[125] The capitalist class was less constrained now, however, and used its power to dominate the recomposing of the state to promote its own interests.[126] While democratic forms were increasingly important to the legitimacy of the government, the politicians who took power undermined the principles of democracy and the institutions intended to protect it. Before the politicians could undermine the new democratic system, a coup later in the 1990s was unlikely for several reasons: the military was reluctant to take a direct role in politics in the wake of the events of 1992, the convergence of traditional elite political forces supported the

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123 McCargo, "Network Monarchy and Legitimacy Crises ." "Right person" typically refers to someone with technocratic competency, loyalty to the monarchy, and public integrity.

124 Amy Freedman, "Thailand's Missed Opportunity for Democratic Consolidation," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 7, no. 2 (2006), http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=449627&jid=JJP&volumeId=7&issueId=02&aid=449626 (accessed February 8, 2011).

125 Michael Kelly Connors, "Goodbye to the Security State: Thailand and Ideological Change," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 33, no. 4 (2003): 434–6, http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=475084221&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 8, 2011).

126 Ibid.

democracy movement and the national institutions that the military valued, and the military's interests were supported by the political forces in power.

In 2001, the billionaire businessman-turned-politician, Thaksin Shinawatra, entered the office of Prime Minister with capitalist class interests and changed the political dynamics of Thailand. Thaksin represented a departure from the state-dominated government that appeared slow and incompetent during the 1997 financial crisis. Big business and politics under Thaksin were Siamese twins, joined at the hip.[127] Thaksin entered office with overwhelming support of the population to make government more responsive and the support of the monarchy. His Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party combined populist policies with big business interests to gain overwhelming electoral support. The corrupt practices of earlier periods in Thailand's politics had not changed, and vote-buying and patronage networks were significant in gaining the electoral support from the rural regions. The majority support that brought the TRT into power also legitimated Thaksin's goals and his role as the nation's leader. Thaksin's interest in power became clear during his term in office, and his practices in office eventually eroded his support and challenged the traditional elites.

The 1990s and early 2000s in Thailand witnessed an increase in democratic forms and legitimacy derived from them. However, the popular election of a leader over a state structure that remained powerful in society did not guarantee the principles that make for genuine democracy. Thaksin's abuse of power and his control of the strong implements of the state eventually eroded support from the middle class and challenged the values of the traditional elites. The network monarchy that had controlled the state before Thaksin looked to a traditional source of support—the military—to regain its position.

C.   THAILAND'S MILITARY BY 2006

Following the aftermath of the 1991 Coup, "the Thai military entered the post 1992 era thoroughly discredited in the political arena."[128] After the events of 1992, the

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127 Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2004), 230.

128 Ockey, "Thailand," 199.

days of the military directly administering the government appeared to be over. However, the military remained a competent institution in its core areas of defense policy and foreign affairs. Thailand's military made shifts toward accepting civilian oversight and becoming a more "professional" force, but the politicized nature of the military leadership returned after Thaksin entered office. The blatant support by Thaksin for his classmates in the promotion process revived a latent loyalty in some military leaders to the monarchy and the traditional elites. Despite the efforts over the last decade-and-a-half to become less political, the military by 2006 was again factionalized and political.

1. Military Competence

Despite the discredit of 1992, the military remained a competent institution within Thailand. Through the 1990s, the military retained prominence in defense policy making and limited the elected government's influence on the military promotions process.[129] The military further increased its role in Foreign Affairs with neighbors Laos and Cambodia, and in low-level projects of development, within the check of the elected officials.[130] With the end of the Cold War, the military signaled that it would broaden its definition of national security beyond anticommunism to include the economy and social security.[131] Throughout the 1990s and the 1997 constitutional changes, Thailand's state structure, and the military as a part of it, remained a strong force within Thai society.

Part of the military's competence came from its remaining within its domain. The military removed itself from direct political roles. The military's strategy for survival was to avoid "direct political involvement and concentrate on the protection of the military's legitimate role and corporate interests."[132] The military recognized that a limited role in politics was good for its interests and internal stability. Social unrest in

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129 Aurel Croissant and D. Kuehn, "Patterns of Civilian Control of the Military in East Asia's New Democracies," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2009): 199, http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1786697231&Fmt=7&clientId=11 969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 8, 2011).

130 Ockey, "Thailand," 203.

131 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, 178.

132 Samutwanit, "Old Soldiers Never Die," 55.

Thailand, according to the National Security Plan of 1997–2001, was believed to be the result of a decaying political system and poor policy implementation; good governance and partnership for national power were necessary for security.[133] Not only was the military less interested in a direct political role, the business class and monarchy created a political environment that would permit greater civilian control over the military.[134] The military retreated from a direct role in politics through the 1990s and remained a viable institution into the 2000s.

2.   Politicized Military and Affronts to Values

The military took a less direct political role between 1992 and 2006, but overt factional politics emerged again among the military leadership in the Thaksin era. In a sense, Thailand's military never really depoliticized.[135] A strong connection remained through the 1990s between the military and the civilian leadership, primarily through Prem's patronage network.[136] Prem was "Senior Statesman" considered above politics, but had strong connections to business and the Democrat Party.[137] During the second administration of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai (1997–2001), Prem's influence was believed to be behind the appointment of General Surayud Chulanot as Army Commander; Surayud institutionalized reforms against corruption and centralized procurement.[138] Prem had laid a foundation of support within the military, which continued regular, merit-based promotions: "By 2001, senior military reshuffles were being actuated almost completely through Prem's signing off on them."[139] The military

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133 Connors, "Goodbye to the Security State," 443.

134 Warren E. Matthews, "Civil-Military Relations in Thailand: Military Autonomy or Civilian Control?" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005), 89, http://edocs.nps.edu/npspubs/scholarly/theses/2005/Jun/05Jun%5FMatthews.pdf (accessed August 13, 2010).

135 McCargo and Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, 129.

136 Ibid., 134.

137 Samutwanit, "Old Soldiers Never Die," 56.

138 McCargo and Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, 132.

139 Paul Chambers, "The Challenges for Thailand's Arch Royalist Military," New Mandala: New Perspectives on Mainland Southeast Asia (blog), June 9, 2010, http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2010/06/09/the-challenges-for-thailand's-arch-royalist-military/ -_ednref2 (accessed August 13, 2010).

leaders, who took a less direct political role, became loyal to the dominant political influence in Thailand, the network monarchy led by Prem.

When Thaksin entered office as Prime Minister, he had learned the lessons of Prime Ministers Sarit Thanarat and Chatichai Choonhawan, recognizing the need to have the support of the military.[140] Starting in 2001, the military promotion process became much more explicitly political when Thaksin sought support for his former classmates from Class 10.[141] Several officers considered Thaksin supporters were promoted to general after being colonels for only a year.[142] Also in 2001, General Surayud, Prem's Army Commander since 1997, was placed in the largely ceremonial position of Supreme Commander.[143] By 2003, Thaksin had his brother-in-law appointed as Army Commander; this was the first time a three star was promoted to full general after only a year.[144] Thaksin also sought military support by increasing its budget and extending his network of influence to the lower ranks: "Thaksin was engaged in helping the military move beyond the dark years that had followed Black May [1992 uprising], supporting their rehabilitation and acknowledging the salience of their political and economic roles."[145] This challenged Prem's dominant role as de facto military caretaker.

Prem's continued influence sought to balance Thaksin's overt politicizing of the military and gave support to those loyal to the traditional elites. In 2005, Prem insisted on the appointment to Army Commander of General Sonthi Boonyarataklin.[146] A key supporter of Sonthi was the First Infantry Division Commander in Bangkok, Lt-General Aunupong Phaochinda.[147] Aunupong, though a classmate of Thaksin, had previously served as a Commander of the Queen's Guard. Indicating the significance of his

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140 McCargo and Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, 122–124.

141 Ibid., 136–140.

142 Pathmanand, "A Different Coup d'État?" 127.

143 McCargo and Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, 136.

144 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, 182.

145 Ibid., 151–2.

146 Chambers, "The Challenges for Thailand's Arch-Royalist Military."

147 Thanong Khanthong, "Sonthi Outsmarted Thaksin at the Eleventh Hour," *The Nation* (Thailand), September 22, 2006.

association to the monarchy, Aunupong's ascendency to Army Commander after the 2006 coup marked a rise within the military of a unified, royalist faction.[148]   The promotion of Class 10 officers aligned with Thaksin had frustrated the more senior officers who were loyal to the influence of the network monarchy. The political nature of the military resurfaced: "Under Thaksin, the supposedly 'bypassed' Thai military – who had actually been woven by Prem into an ingenious web of patronage, with support from the palace and the Democrats—emerged from the political closet."[149] The rise in rhetoric supporting the monarchy leading up to the Diamond Jubilee in 2006 gave the royalist supporters the emphasis necessary to stand against the government.[150]   The social movements supporting the king, as described below, gave backing to the military leaders who felt Thaksin threatened the prominence of the monarchy as an institution.[151] Some military leaders feared the influence on Thaksin and his policies by former communists and activists who returned to politics during the opening political space in the 1980s.[152]

Prem's address to the graduating class of the military academy in June of 2006 (during the time of the interim administration after the April elections were nullified, a topic addressed in more detail below) stressed to the cadets that the military belonged to the king and not to the government.[153] The rise in royalist support among the military leaders countered the faction of Thaksin supporters.

Thaksin's influence over the state went far beyond military appointments. Thaksin also remapped the bureaucratic structure, increasing the number of ministries from 14 to 20; he removed the Budget Bureau's command over the budget, increasing the cabinet ministers' authority over the funds; he sidelined the National Economic and

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148 Chambers, "The Challenges for Thailand's Arch-Royalist Military."

149 McCargo and Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, 156.

150 Pathmanand, "A Different Coup d'État?" 128.

151 Interview in Bangkok with Thai political science professor, March 2, 2011.

152 Interview with long-term director of international organization and expert on Thailand's politics, February 26, 2011.

153 Colum Murphy, "Putting Thailand Together Again," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 169, no. 8 (2006), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1145445481&Fmt=7&clientId=11 969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed August 13, 2010).

Social Development Board; and he appointed businessmen to positions normally held by officials.[154] The king had also lost favor of Thaksin. Any favor Thaksin had in 2001 from the monarchy was gone by 2002, over concern with Thaksin's meddling in royal family affairs and his business connections with the king's family members.[155] As early as his birthday speech in December 2001, the king commented on the "egoism" and "double-standards" of Thaksin's government; Prem further warned Thaksin about his double standards in 2005 and many times in between.[156] Handley argues that Thaksin's strength in his political position could have influenced the royal succession process.[157] In this way and other, Thaksin challenged the interests and values of the traditional elites—the bureaucrats and the monarchy.

Thaksin's effort to gain military support through increased budgets and promotions had the ironic effect of supporting his own ousters. With the blatant re-politicizing of promotions within the military, "Instead of marking the triumph of Thailand's private sector over its moribund military and bureaucracy, Thaksin's rule celebrated the kind of distasteful structural corruption that had characterized earlier periods of Thai politics."[158] The military leaders, who were loyal to the monarchy and frustrated by the re-politicizing of promotions, aligned their values to those of other traditional elites, who supported the network monarchy system that existed before the democratic reforms. The traditional elites may have accepted the reforms of the 1997 Constitution, but a corrupt, exceptionally wealthy businessman who was consolidating power now compromised their influence in the system. Opposing Thaksin now meant aligning under the traditional institutions of leadership, particularly the network monarchy and its military supporters.

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154 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, 185.

155 Anonymous, "Intelligence," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 165, no. 1 (2002).

156 Michael H. Nelson, "Thaksin Overthrown: Thailand's 'Well Intentioned' Coup of September 19, 2006," *East Asia* 6, no. 1: 6, http://eastasia.at/documents/eastasia.html (accessed February 9, 2011).

157 Paul M. Handley, "What the Thai Coup Was Really About," *Asia Sentinel*, November 6, 2006, http://www.asiasentinel.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=249&Itemid=31 (accessed February 8, 2011).

158 McCargo and Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, 157.

D.   THAKSIN'S ADMINISTRATION

Thaksin entered office in 2001 under a populist appeal but with an agenda to promote his own business interests, which in turn supported his political ambitions. Thaksin dominated the electoral system and through patronage appointments created a grip on power over the government that furthered his authoritarian motives. Although his government was quite responsive to the rural public and he had a strong hold on power, he corrupted the political process to such an extent that its institutions and processes were no longer a legitimate representation of the people. The civil disobedience of the middle class could not remove this authoritarian-leaning leader, and instead created a political stalemate by constitutional crisis.

1.   Civilian Incompetence

The incompetence of the Thaksin administration was the erosion of the democratic process and its legitimacy. Thaksin exploited the power of the executive for populist policies and for personal gain. The strength of the office also permitted Thaksin to manipulate the political system to ensure his party would remain in power, but the corruption of the elections and independent bodies undermined the democratic process. The government also used its strength in campaigns that violated human rights and civil liberties. Thaksin's exploitation of the power of his office reflected his sense of authority over the government and ultimately undermined the legitimacy of the democratic process.

In 2001, Thailand's state remained a strong institution run by bureaucrats, but the new electoral system helped legitimate new politicians who were placed at the top rather than the traditional elites. Politics had not changed much because money still decided who won elections and politicians still were not very representative of the people who elected them.[159] Money politics with populist programs though enabled the Thai Rak Thai Party to have an unusually strong position in the elected parliament.   The bureaucracy that had been created to serve the centralized state now had a new, powerful

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159 Duncan McCargo, "Democracy under Stress in Thaksin's Thailand," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 4 (2002): 125, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jod/summary/v013/13.4mccargo.html (accessed February 8, 2011).

leadership that used the strength of the state institutions to further its own interests and power. Thaksin ran the country like a company, ready to mobilize any national asset, and the bureaucratic processes in place were inhibiting.[160] The public initially welcomed his direct methods of governance.   The Thaksin government failed to become actual representatives of the people, however, and refused to respond to the opposition's demands and reach compromise. By 2006, the middle class withdrew its support when the regime appeared more authoritarian than representative.

Thaksin gained public support by offering economic and social programs that were presented as supporting Thai values and offered an acceptable alternative to what appeared to be the ineffective government that handled the financial crisis of 1997 and the subsequent prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund that had frustrated so many in Thailand.   "Thaksinomics" on its face promoted local businesses, local governance, and "Thai ingenuity."[161] Thaksin determined what was important to the populace and used the constitutionally reformed powers of the executive to deliver efficiently on campaign promises.[162] Thaksin's direct approach worked: "Indeed, some of Thaksin's popularity may even have lain in his very abasement of democratic procedures, catering to the impatience of his constituents."[163] The character by which Thaksin accomplished his goals while in office was initially popular, but the directness of his leadership also revealed a sense of personal authority over the state and undermined participatory democracy.

Thaksin's administration took advantage of the strong powers granted to the executive office by the 1997 Constitution, in business and security issues, which brought criticism from the opposition parties and the network monarchy, leading them to portray him as dishonest and disloyal to the nation. A few key events demonstrate Thaksin's use

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160 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, 101–3.

161 Ibid., 115.

162 William Case, "Democracy's Quality and Breakdown: New Lessons from Thailand," (working paper, Southeast Asia Research Centre Working Paper Series (no. 83), City University of Hong Kong, 2007), 13,http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a780835521 (accessed February 8, 2011).

163 Ibid., 17.

of his executive powers for personal gain. Thaksin's wealth came as a result of earlier governments granting concessions to his businesses, particularly Shin Corp in the telecommunications industry.[164] In addition to supporting some of the common people's needs and promoting local businesses, Thaksin heavily promoted his own business interests, granting monopoly concessions for his companies.[165] This compelled investors to add as much as a one-third premium to the value of the shares associated with him.[166]

Thaksin also used his power to weaken civil liberties and commit human rights abuses. He "embarked on several campaigns which have negative consequences for civil rights/civil liberties and which ultimately call into question the very nature of Thailand's political reforms."[167] The 2003 War on Drugs saw an estimated 2,637 extrajudicial killings by government-affiliated gunmen shooting alleged drug dealers.[168] In 2004, the counterinsurgency campaign in the Malay-Muslim southern provinces also witnessed the heavy hand of the military when militants took refuge inside the sacred Kru Ze mosque in April 2004. The subsequent raid on and deaths of the significantly outmatched militants caused much criticism for the army, whose local commanders remained unquestioning in its decision. The raid deepened misunderstandings between the army and the Malay-Muslims. The decision to carry out the raid raised questions about the chain of command within the army. In October 2004, the army shot at protesters who gathered at Tak Bai, killing seven. To transport other protestors out of the area, the army bound their arms behind them and stacked them laying on top of each other as many as eight high in the back of trucks for several hours; 78 died from suffocation. These two events in particular discredited the army with the Southern population. Army investigations revealed that the hard line tactics were not effective. International reports about the incidents heavily

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164 McCargo and Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, 27.

165 Michael J. Montesano, "Thailand in 2001: Learning to Live with Thaksin?" *Asian Survey* 42, no. 1 (2002), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2002.42.1.90 (accessed March 16, 2011).

166 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, 224.

167 Freedman, "Thailand's Missed Opportunity," 183.

168 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, 162.

criticized Thaksin, Thailand, and its military.[169] The strong executive powers of the Prime Minister gave Thaksin a strong hand in governance, but the use of those for personal gain and extrajudicial use of force lowered his support among the middle class and civil society groups.

Thaksin's corruption of the political system and abuse of executive power reflected his sense of authority. Major features of the 2001 election that brought him to power were the traditionally used electioneering methods of vote buying, manipulation, patronage networks, and intimidation.[170] As a result of the 1997 constitutional reforms, however, the Thai Rak Thai was the first party to achieve an actual majority in Thailand's parliament. Thaksin then sought to build a grand majority in the government to marginalize the role of factional leaders.[171] The Democrat Party was eventually the only opposition party remaining, and it did not have enough seats to call for a vote of no confidence when Thaksin's policies were questionable.[172] Thaksin wanted a one-party system like in Singapore.[173] He used the traditional patronage networks and government concessions to build the TRT support within parliament. Thaksin made patronage appointments to the organizations that were intended to be independent oversight of the government, and these appointments compromised the organizations' ability to challenge the elected government.[174] By the 2005 election, the benefits of office were enough that direct vote buying was no longer as necessary because the politicians accepted the promises of government expenditures.[175] Thaksin understood the election results as a popular mandate for his policies and, taking that a step further, as his right to determine the will of the people, rather than his duty to carry out the people's will. He combined

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169 For information about the incidents at Krue Ze and Tak Bai, see McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land*, 108–113.

170 McCargo and Pathmanand, *The Thaksinization of Thailand*, 99.

171 Ibid., 84.

172 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, 95.

173 Ibid., 240.

174 Interview with official at Thai government research agency, March 1, 2011.

175 Aurel Croissant and Daniel Pojar Jr., "Quo Vadis Thailand? Thai Politics after the 2005 Parliamentary Elections," *Strategic Insight* 4, no. 6 (2005), http://www.nps.edu/Academics/centers/ccc/publications/OnlineJournal/2005/Jun/croissantJun05.html (accessed January 07, 2011).

the Western concept of social contract with politics from modern Buddhist thinking, claiming that he was the good, disinterested leader who could determine what is best for the country. Within this concept, opposition was viewed as illegitimate.[176] Thaksin further ensured an unchallenged position over the government by politicizing the independent bodies intended to oversee the political process. After the 2001 election, the appointments to the Election Commission were highly politicized, and the problematic 2001 ruling from the Constitutional Court on Thaksin's accused corruption undermined judicial legitimacy and illustrated the failure to embrace genuine demonstrate democratic reforms.[177] Thaksin entered office with a wide base of support, and the success of the elections and his vast resources permitted his party to influence the political so much so that Thaksin could remain in power indefinitely and with little challenge.

The results of the popular elections in 2001 and 2005 supported Thaksin's ideas about running the government. Thaksin used the strong power of the executive for his populist policies, but he also used them for personal gain and for manipulating the political system, both of which strengthened his power in office. The consolidation of power under a single party and the government campaigns that negatively affected civil liberties created problems for democratic consolidation. What was occurring was the tyranny of the majority.[178] The weakness of the opposition in government did not permit a political counter, so those opposing the government sought extra-constitutional means, resulting in a political stalemate.

2. Political Stalemate

The corruption of the democratic system and the abuse of power made many enemies for Thaksin, who did not view the political system as capable of fixing the problems. The boycott of to the April 2006 election by opposition groups prevented the elections of ministers to a new government. A political stalemate occurred when

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176 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics in Thailand*, 136–9.

177 McCargo, "Democracy Under Stress," 119–20; Freedman, "Thailand's Missed Opportunity," 180–1, 190.

178 Federico Ferrara, *Thailand Unhinged: Unraveling the Myth of a Thai-Style Democracy* (Singapore: Equinox Publishing, 2010), 48.

government was unable to form. The Thaksin administration had corrupted the democratic system enough that the support for the system eroded underneath it. The inability to form a government permitted the rising royalist support in the military to gain a stronger political position, which would be key during the interim government immediately prior to the September 2006 Coup.

The 2005 election was another landslide victory for Thaksin. Thai Rak Thai won an overwhelming number of seats with considerable use of illicit means.[179] Soon after the election, a new political movement, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) demonstrated in mass protests in Bangkok in opposition to Thaksin and TRT. Led by a business and economic rival to Thaksin, Sondhi Limthngkul, the PAD took up the royalist cause, an effective means to gain public support because it appears to be above politics.[180] In January 2006, Sondhi's cause gained further support after Thaksin sold his shares in Shin Corp and satellite technology for an enormous profit without paying taxes on it.[181] This event, while within the letter of the law, gave the opposition an example of how Thaksin was not loyal to the nation even ostensibly putting national security at risk. In an effort to shore up his electoral support against the PAD demonstrations, Thaksin called for elections in April 2006.

Rather than proposing opposition candidates, the PAD led a successful campaign for people to officially vote for none of the candidates on the ballot. By the laws under the 1997 Constitution, an unopposed candidate needed 20 percent consent by the voters. Concerned that the candidates would not receive the necessary 20 percent, the TRT illegally entered candidates who were paid to be the opposition.[182] Despite the activities of the TRT, the none-of-the-above campaign was successful in its goal, and by the end of April many ministers remained unelected. TRT still won 56 percent of the party list seats, a significant decline from the 2005 election, but the government could not form

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179 Croissant and Pojar, "Quo Vadis Thailand?"

180 Ferrara, *Thailand Unhinged: Unraveling the Myth of a Thai-Style Democracy*, 48.

181 Case, "Democracy's Quality and Breakdown: New Lessons from Thailand," 18.

182 Interview with long-term director of international organization and expert on Thailand's politics, February 26, 2011.

without all of the ministers.[183]   After a meeting with the king following the April election, Thaksin conceded to stepping down from Prime Minister in an apparent attempt to reconcile the results. In May, the Constitutional Court followed the king's earlier call to resolve the situation of the "undemocratic election," nullified the results, and scheduled re-elections for October.[184] Thaksin soon after decided to remain as caretaker Prime Minister and head of his party until the re-elections.[185] However, Thaksin had no constitutional authority to take this action.[186]   Further, other constitutional problems arose for the election scheduled in October. There was no Election Commission ready to oversee the election; in its absence the Senate oversees the election, but there was no Senate formed either. The judiciary was left without a constitutional means to ensure an election. The boycott of the election and the loss of support for Thaksin from party members resulting from the demonstrations created a political deadlock.

The political stalemate resulted from the lack of commitment to the democratic process by both the Thaksin government and the opposition. This problem with the political structure was noted as early as 2002.[187] That the opposition parties took to demonstrations and boycotts further undermined the quality of the democracy in Thailand, already weakened by Thaksin's authoritarian leanings.[188]   Neither side genuinely sought to promote and abide by the democratic process. What was at stake was the competition for power between a Thaksin-led, capitalist-based, popularly supported network of patronage through government concessions and a traditional elite

183 Croissant and Pojar, "Quo Vadis Thailand?"

184 Ferrara, *Thailand Unhinged*, 50.

185 Colum Murphy, "A Tug of War for Thailand's Soul," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 169, no. 7 (2006), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=1123969851&Fmt=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 8, 2011).

186 Interview with long-term director of international organization and expert on Thailand's politics, February 26, 2011.

187 McCargo, "Democracy Under Stress."

188 Case, "Democracy's Quality and Breakdown: New Lessons from Thailand."

and opposition parties that espoused the defense of the monarchy against extreme corruption. This stalemate set the stage for a threat to the military's interests enough so to precipitate a coup.

E.   IMMEDIATE CAUSES: THREATS TO MILITARY INTERESTS

Politics in Thailand in 2006 included a backdrop of rising royalist support in the military and in groups opposed to the Thaksin government, a corrupted political system mired in deadlock, and latent concerns about royal succession. As in 1991, the reshuffle of military leaders again took a prominent role. Thaksin's proposed appointments were a direct threat to the interests of the royalist supporters and reflected the tactics Thaksin was willing to use to remain in power. In this context, the royal-supporting military stepped in, using the known repertoire of the coup, to save the nation from an authoritarian-leaning leader.

As some of the middle class and the monarchy withdrew its support for Thaksin during 2006, the military also made its initial moves to check his power. During the demonstrations by the PAD, Thaksin sought military support for declaring a state of emergency. As Army Commander and Prem supporter, General Sonthi recognized that the outcry from the public against the military could be used by Thaksin to remove him from the Army Commander post, so Sonthi kept Thaksin at bay.[189] In July 2006, Prem delivered a speech to the graduating cadets about the loyalty of the military belonging with the king and not the government; one week later, a midyear military reshuffle reappointed mid-ranking officers, who could be considered Thaksin supporters, to units without fighting troops.[190] As the October election approached, Sonthi's intelligence agency learned of an upcoming PAD demonstration that was likely to turn violent.[191] Such an event would have given Thaksin his opportunity to declare emergency powers, and his proposed military reshuffle in August would have supported Thaksin's authority.

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189 Pathmanand, "A Different Coup d'État?" 129.

190 Ibid., 128–129.

191 Khanthong, "Sonthi Outsmarted Thaksin at the Eleventh Hour."

The 2006 proposed reshuffle of military leaders benefited Thaksin more than previous years' reshuffles. Thaksin attempted to promote his ally, Maj-General Prin Suwannthat, from First Infantry Brigade to the Division Commander in Bangkok and to place Maj-General Prin's ally, Maj-General Daopong Ratanasuwan, as Commander of First Infantry. As long-term Thailand correspondent Shawn Crispin noted: "With assistant army commander Pornchai Kranlert in place, the reshuffle, if accomplished, would have given Thaksin an unbroken chain of command over crack troops responsible for Bangkok's security."[192] This reshuffle would have locked Thakin's control over the military at the center of power. If a state of emergency were declared with willing military support, Thaksin would have had complete control over Thailand.

Army Commander Sonthi had been put in place at Prem's insistence in 2005 and had the support of the First Infantry Division Commander in Bangkok, Lt-General Aunupong and Lt-General Saphrang Kalayanamit of the Third Army. To avert the PAD demonstration and what would be Thaksin's subsequent declarations and promotions, the army staged its coup. Thaksin was in New York at a UN conference, and his local military supporters were unable to move; troops from the upcountry were also mobilized.[193] Despite these military leaders being reluctant to assume political power, the check on the factional balance of military power within Bangkok during the political stalemate proved to be too much of a threat to the interests of the royalists. The bloodless coup again followed its historical format.

F.   ANALYSIS

1.   Factors Present

Although the factors that led to the 2006 had a different character, the contributing elements were similar to the coup of 1991. The three principles of Koonings and Krujit's political army—birthright, civilian incompetence, and military

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192 Shawn W. Crispin, "Thailand: All the King's Men," *Asia Times*, September 21, 2006, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/HI21Ae02.html (accessed February 9, 2011).

193 Khanthong, "Sonthi Outsmarted Thaksin at the Eleventh Hour."

competence—resurfaced for the 2006 coup.[194] Karsten's conditions for military coups that threaten elected governments again included political stalemate, affronts to military values, and direct threats to the military's interests.[195] Not one of these conditions alone would suffice for the coup, but the combination of the factors was necessary.

On the face of the situation in Thailand by 2006, Koonings and Krujit's factors would not necessarily appear relevant. The Thaksin administration appeared quite powerful. People were wary of the military being directly involved in politics after the events of 1992, and the military appeared to return to the barracks and accept civilian control. However, the reality proved quite different. The civilian government came into power using democratic forms but was again unable to institutionalize as representatives of the people and to establish a political process that permitted a vibrant opposition. The strength of Thaksin's government and the corruption of the democratic processes eventually eroded the quality of the constitutional system. Democratic consolidation under the elected leaders was in doubt. The opposition, with some middle class support, also went outside of the political process and called on the institutions of the monarchy and military to remove Thaksin's government. The military remained a competent institution through the 1990s, particularly in areas of Foreign Ministry and defense politics. The military also benefited from the connections to the network monarchy under Prem and the spoils of Thaksin's courting. Although the military appeared to move toward accepting civilian control, factions developed when the promotions process became expressly politicized under Thaksin and royalist rhetoric surged at the time of the Diamond Jubilee. Military leaders, particularly from the Queen's Guard, were still more sympathetic to the national institution of the monarchy than to the democratic process. The monarchy, the pillar of the nation that had established the strength of the state in Thailand using the military's support and gave legitimacy to the military's leadership over so many decades, still retained the military's support. Each of Kooning and Krujit's principles for a political army were met for the 2006 coup.

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[194] Koonings and Kruijt, *Political Armies*, 19.

[195] Karsten, "The Coup d'Etat in Competitive Democracies," 223–250.

Similarly, the set of conditions presented by Karsten occurred in 2006 as had in 1991. A political stalemate ensued when the opposition also rejected the constitutional process for electing leaders and caused a political deadlock. The values of the royalist military leaders aligned with those of the traditional elites of Thailand's politics, which Thaksin challenged through his grip on electoral authority and strong use of the executive office over the bureaucracy. Thaksin valued his personal control over the government and its processes, but the military leaders valued the processes and politics institutionalized by the network monarchy prior to Thaksin's election. The interests of the military leaders in position were directly threatened with Thaksin's plan to lock in security over Bangkok by aligning the military reshuffle in his favor. The conditions were present such that the threat posed by the reshuffle could precipitate a coup.

2. Factors Not Present for the 2006 Coup

Karsten's factors of economic distress and political corruption were again not relevant to the timing of the coup. For the factor of economic distress, the military stepped in at a time when economics were strong. During the financial crisis of 1997, the external pressure from the IMF for reform supported the move to democracy; although the military resisted some of the changes, a coup was not staged then.[196] By 2006, Thailand was no longer under the microscope of the IMF. Under Thaksin, Thailand's economy grew stronger, with GDP growth rates of 1.9 percent in 2001, 5.3 percent in 2002, and 6.7 percent in 2003; "Thaksinomics" appeared to be a new economic model for Thailand's growth and possible competition with China.[197] During the first six months of 2006, the political turmoil caused a nine percent drop in the Stock Exchange of Thailand, but the annual GDP was still expected to be up by 3.5 percent.[198] Thailand was

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196 Freedman, "Thailand's Missed Opportunity."

197 Robert Looney, "Thaksinomics: A New Asian Paradigm?" *Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies* 29, no. 1 (2004), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=637161181&Fmt=7&clientId=119 69&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 9, 2011).

198 Pichit Likitkijsomboon, "Thais Pay the Price for Political Turmoil," *Far Eastern Economic Review* 169, no. 6 (2006), http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.libproxy.nps.edu/pqdweb?did=1080606661&Fm t=7&clientId=11969&RQT=309&VName=PQD (accessed February 8, 2011).

still economically strong and growing. In comparison, the financial shock of 1997 was a period of much greater economic distress. While the military opposed some of the reforms set by the 1997 Constitution, no coup occurred at that time when the balance of political forces favored steps toward democracy.[199] Thus, neither economic downturn nor democratization per se caused a coup.

Corruption as a factor in 2006 was similar to what it had been in 1991. Corruption was pervasive and had eroded the quality of the democratic process. When the factions came together against Thaksin in 2006, they also sought means outside of the Constitution to remove Thaksin from power, appealing to the monarchy and the military. The Shin Corporation sale was seen as an example of Thaksin's disloyalty to the nation rather than simply unacceptable corruption. Many of Thaksin's corrupt business practices had occurred well before the Shin Corp. sale. The general public accepted many of the human rights abuses from the government as part of its efficiency. The royalist supporters claimed defense against the authoritarianism of Thaksin, not against his corruption. The military and elite supporters were concerned about the loss of their influence over the government. Thaksin's practices gradually made enough enemies and provided justification for demanding his removal, but the practices themselves were not the issue. Instead, the issue was his consolidation of power and ability to enact his will over the government.

3.   Counterfactuals

Thaksin appeared to have a solid lock on the political system. The new political structure of the 1997 Constitution created a strong executive role to counter the instability of earlier periods. The patronage networks were still able to put elected politicians into office, and the independent bodies were also corruptible. Thaksin extended his patronage network to the military and the bureaucracy. The landslide victories of the Thai Rak Thai appeared to ensure that Thaksin's hold on power would remain.

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199 Case, "Democracy's Quality and Breakdown."

The grip on power by Thaksin challenged the traditional elites at a sensitive time. The network monarchy grew concerned about Thaksin's influence on the succession of the monarchy. Had the monarchy as an institution not perceived Thaksin's power as a threat, the influence on the military promotions by the network monarchy would likely have been unnecessary. The rise of the royalist support, however uncoordinated, would likely have not have been able to claim Thaksin was disloyal to the central institution to Thailand.

The overt repoliticizing of promotions challenged the military as an institution. Although Prem retained his influence within the promotion process, the system was agreeable to those within it. Thaksin's support from his classmates could likely have lasted the time necessary for them to make regular promotions. However, when Thaksin began to overtly appoint his supporters above more senior officers, support emerged for the institutionalized process established by the network monarchy prior to Thaksin. Thaksin could potentially have retained support in the ranks with the increased budget and lower-level patronage. Alternatively, Thaksin could have appealed to the interests of those bypassed leaders by providing them good positions outside of the military, in businesses or other ministries. By 2006, the military was reluctant to step in. Had the factions not repoliticized so strongly, the urgency of the coup at its timing may not have been recognized.

What would have most certainly avoided the coup, but was least likely to occur, was adherence to the constitutional process. Thaksin had clearly corrupted the process, but the opposition groups sought extraconstitutional means for a change in power because they recognized they could not win in the elections. Had the opposition run candidates such that an election could be valid, the political stalemate and constitutional deadlock in the Parliament would not have occurred. The legal conundrum provided some justification for the action, as no constitutional means remained for resolving the deadlock. Otherwise, the military would have had to step in against the constitutionally elected government, which it seemed reluctant to do. While the Thaksin government was certainly turning authoritarian, calling on the military to oust the government throws out

the entire democratic process. Commitment to the democratic process by the opposition groups would have limited the calls for the monarchy and military to step in.

G.   CONCLUSION

Thaksin's administration shifted toward a popularly elected authoritarianism and permitted an opposition group to claim this government as disloyal to the monarchy and the nation. The civilian incompetence was the abuse of executive power for personal gain, the failures of internal security in the Southern regions, and the inability of the government to accept opposition within the political framework. Rising royalist support sought to counter Thaksin's strong influence over the government but went outside of the democratic process. Political stalemate resulted from the extra constitutional means by the opposition in the boycott that resulted in no government being able to form. Royalist support within the military leadership, a result of network monarchy influence before the Thaksin administration, reemerged when the promotions were blatantly repoliticized by Thaksin. The royalist supporters in the military had values that aligned with traditional elites, who were challenged by Thaksin's rising power and ability to enact his will over the government. The proposed military reshuffle of 2006, just prior to the October reelection, would have given Thaksin unchecked control over security in Bangkok. With the democratic process unable to counter Thaksin's influence, the royalist military leaders' interests were threatened. The military leaders felt compelled to step in to save the nation.

V. CONCLUSION

Why did the Thai military intervene in 1991 and 2006 to take over the political process by replacing civilian executive leaders with its generals after significant strides toward consolidating democracy, the seemingly widespread adoption of democratic values in Thai society, and the development of a significant middle class and civil society? What implication might this have for theories about civil-military relations in general and about coup d'états more specifically? The dependent variable of this study is the presence and outcome of a military coup over an elected government. The independent variables are the result of a complex mix of structural and cultural conditions present at the time of each coup. These conditions have an underlying identity held by the military as the defender of the nation and its institutions, such that serious threats to them compel the military to take action. The last two coups in Thailand have broader implications for the role of the military in governance and society in democratizing states, civil-military relations, and the future of political stability in Thailand: a coup requires more than a decision by the military leaders to take control of the political process. Structural and cultural conditions influence the military's decision and permit—and even welcome—the coup leaders into power.

The coups of 1991 and 2006 are different in character but similar in conditions. In 1991, military leaders with a traditional mindset of elite dominance over government and society attempted to reassert control over the political process; while temporary successful this ended with disastrous results in 1992 known as Black May for the massacre that took place on peaceful protestors seeking democratic reforms. In 2006, the democratic process fell apart because the elected leader corrupted the institutions and the weakened opposition sought means outside of the constitutional process; a repoliticized military sought to reset the political process in favor of the network monarchy, which had overseen the government prior to this corrupted yet elected administration. However, Neither of these characterizations offers the complete picture of how the military decided to step in. A set of conditions was necessary to allow the coup to occur; the conditions are all necessary and only collectively sufficient.

The conditions surrounding both of the coups were similar. In both events, the military acted as a "political army" as defined by Koonings and Krujit.[200] Possessing a "birthright principle," the military has a history in the foundation of the nation and considers itself the defender of the nation of last resort; thus its values are translated to the nation as a whole. In 1991, the military valued the traditional position of a strong state in control of the political process. In 2006, the military valued the leadership of the network monarchy that had institutionalized its processes during the 1990s, before the Thaksin administration. Both the civilian Chatichai and Thaksin governments demonstrated incompetence in their leadership. The technocratic incompetence and continual cabinet reshuffles by the Chatichai administration demonstrated that the ability to gain office was not enough to lead once there or to stay. While Thaksin was initially well accepted for implementing his populist policies, the strength of his government— and its use of corruption for personal gain and recurrent human rights abuses— undermined some of the people's support and demonstrated its incompetence.

Finally, in both cases, the military was in a relatively strong, competent political position. In 1991, the military had benefited from years of social entrenchment during the anticommunist campaign, in which the military liberalized politics, albeit cautiously. In 2006, the military had years of remaining within its domain, focusing on military-specific issues without a direct role in politics. The military had become the politically disinterested defender of the nation's interests, but the blatant repoliticization of the promotion process by Thaksin exposed how traditional leaders preferred the regular, merit-based promotions under the Prem-led network monarchy period of the 1990s. With the birthright principle, civilian incompetence, and military competence, Thailand's military acted as a political army.

Several factors provided by Karsten were also present for both coups.[201] Before each event, the aforementioned civilian incompetence led to political stalemate. In 1991, Chatichai formed three cabinets within four months in an attempt to retain power, but no coalition was stable enough to retain the legitimacy of elected office. In 2006, the

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[200] Koonings and Kruijt, *Political Armies*.

[201] Karsten, "The Coup d'Etat in Competitive Democracies," 223–250.

opposition to Thaksin in the April election caused a constitutional deadlock; Thaksin illegally declared himself caretaker Prime Minister; and the future election could not be assured against corruption. Both governments prior to the coup had lost the support of the monarchy as a result of the incompetence and withdrawal of support from the Bangkok middle class. The interests of the military, particularly in promotions, were threatened by each of the elected governments. In 1991, the attempt to appoint General Arthit into the government would have checked the authority of General Suchinda and the unified Class Five leadership. In 2006, the upcoming military reshuffle would have put Thaksin supporters within the military in charge of security around Bangkok.

Finally, before both coups, the elected governments challenged the military's values, which were generally aligned with traditional elites. In 1991, General Suchinda and the Class Five leaders attempted to assert the authority of the military over the political system as had been done so often in Thailand's political history. In 2006, several military leaders expressed their preference for the Prem-led, network monarchy system that preceded Thaksin's authoritarian-leaning, populist, incompetent, and military-politicizing government. For both coups, corruption provided a justification and underlying cause but was not actually resolved by the coup, so corruption per se cannot be considered a causal factor. Also, the economy in Thailand was relatively strong at the time of each coup, and no coup occurred during the financial crisis of 1997–8; so economic distress cannot be considered a causal factor either.

Different factors may have driven the coups in Thailand in 1991 and 2006, but the conditions that enable the coup to occur were similar. Each of the factors were necessary: Karsten's factors of political stalemate, threats to military interests, and affronts to military values; plus Koonings and Krujit's notion of a political army derived from the birthright principle, civilian incompetence, and military competence shored up by military unity. In 1991, the traditional values of the army led them to stage the coup; in 2006, the incompetence and breakdown of the elected political system compelled the army to stage the coup. In either case, the one factor was not sufficient. In both cases, the sum of the factors present enabled the coup.

Thailand's military values itself as the defender of the nation. In 1991, that sense drove the military to step in over the elected politicians. In 2006, the breakdown of the election system again compelled the military to take action. In both cases, the military justified its action as being good for the nation and was initially welcomed in each. As the case of 2006 demonstrates, even when the military does not openly seek direct political leadership, the value of defending the nation may compel the military to step in when it feels such action is necessary. This sense of necessity alone, however, is not sufficient; the other factors are necessary, too. Further, a coup will not occur when a military has no sense of propriety in taking direct political leadership and will allow the elected leaders to fail in their role.

Exploration on the nature of politics and democracy in Thai society is still necessary. That the ideas of a "Thai-style democracy" persist may be informative of what direction the future of Thai politics may take.[202] Further research into theories of legal foundations and democracy may also be informative to projecting how the current military-supported regime may shore up the underpinnings of democracy. Thailand's future acceptance of rule of law, which is central to a consolidated, well-functioning democracy, is complicated by the recurrence of coups. As security scholar Edward Luttwak notes: "Some contemporary republics have ended in this position, which comes about when a long series of illegal seizures of power leads to a decay of the legal and political structures which are needed to produce new governments."[203] The occurrence of these coups is not only affected by the mindset of the military which conducts them, but also the structural and cultural conditions that support the military's actions. How Thailand's society and politics can continue on the path to democracy without reliance on the military to oversee the process deserves further study.

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[202] Englehart, "Democracy and the Thai Middle Class," 253.

[203] Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'Etat: A Practical Handbook* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 215.

A.   IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY[204]

Thailand and the United States have a long-lasting and strong relationship. Both nations value the other's position in international relations. The United States has even designated Thailand a Major NonNATO Ally. The largest multinational exercise hosted by the United States, Cobra Gold, is hosted in Thailand. The foundation of that relationship is the military to military ties between the nations. From the 1940s, through the Vietnam War era, and into today, the relationship between the United States and Thailand has a military foundation that is important to both nations.

The primary driver of the strong relationship between the United States and Thailand is the international balance of powers, particularly within Southeast Asia. The significance of the mutual relationship for each nation is how the other is positioned within the international order. Currently, Thailand views its interests as balancing influence from the United States and China. Thailand understands that both the United States and China are large, economically powerful states with robust militaries and security interests in Southeast Asia. The United States' interest in Thailand is its geographic location and the desire to limit the encroachment of China's interests in the region. The long-standing history of good relations fosters this mutual vision about the balance of power in Southeast Asia and Asia more broadly.

Thailand felt a strain on the nature of this relationship in the early 1990s. At the end of the Cold War as the international order shifted, Thailand felt that the United States had withdrawn support from a loyal anticommunist nation. Since that time, the relationship between the nations has strengthened again. Thailand has committed its military to the goals of countering terrorism, human and drug trafficking, and other transnational crime as Western militaries have done in the past two decades. Thailand has also supported the United States in its recent military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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204 The ideas in this section are the product of several interviews conducted in Bangkok from 25 February 2011 to 3 March 2011. Those interviewed include United States military officers, a former director for an international organization and expert on Thailand's politics, professors at Thammasat and Chulalongkorn Universities, an official at a government research office, a former senior officer in the Royal Thai military and politician, and a Thai government official.

Part of the nature of the mutual relationship between the United States and Thailand is respecting the other's independence. Domestic political instability in Thailand has affected the relationship with the United States, but this was a limited impact. The United States withdrew military and financial support immediately following the 2006 coup. The total number of exercises dipped in 2006, and, in 2007, the United States withdrew all funds for International Military Education and Training (IMET). The United States restored support once an election occurred in late 2007. The total number of exercises increased in 2007, and by 2008 exercises were above pre-coup levels; IMET funding returned to reduced levels in 2008.[205] In the absence of the support from the United States, China is willing and able to increase its support without the conditions on Thailand's political system. Thailand understands the United States' reasons for withdrawing support following a coup and how the ideal of democracy fits into the United States' foreign policies. The withdrawal of support by the United States, or even concerns about its loss, was not a factor in the coup decision. Thailand is interested in maintaining a strong relationship with the United States but considers the domestic political situation independent of their relationship.

Thailand is independently committed to promoting democracy and understands itself to be on a path of development that may have some backward steps along the way.[206] The friction along the path is not an objection to democracy per se, but the problems reflect a desire to maintain social stability and national independence. Following a coup, the interest in Thailand to returning to normal diplomatic and military-to-military relations with the United States creates some pressure to return to democratic processes. While this pressure exists, the United States should not overestimate its influence on Thailand's politics from its military and financial support because the support from China is still available in the absence of the United States.

The United States should not be deterred from its strong relationship with Thailand due to domestic political instability. None of the leaders on any sides of the

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205 Data from JUSMAGTHAI brief to U.S. Ambassador, January 13, 2011. Total exercises (includes bilateral and multilateral) by year—2005:41, 2006:33; 2007:37; 2008:46. 2006 included an increase in multilateral exercises but a decreases in bilateral.

206 Interview conducted with Thailand government official, March 2, 2011.

political spectrum are interested in breaking ties with the United States, so domestic political instability should not threaten the relationship with the United States. Although China may continue support of Thailand through the instability, Thailand is not interested in a dominant Chinese influence.

While the United States has Western notions of professional military role and Thailand has a different notion of what is meant by a professional military, these do not distract from their willingness or ability to support each other in international affairs, security issues, economic development, and democratization.

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